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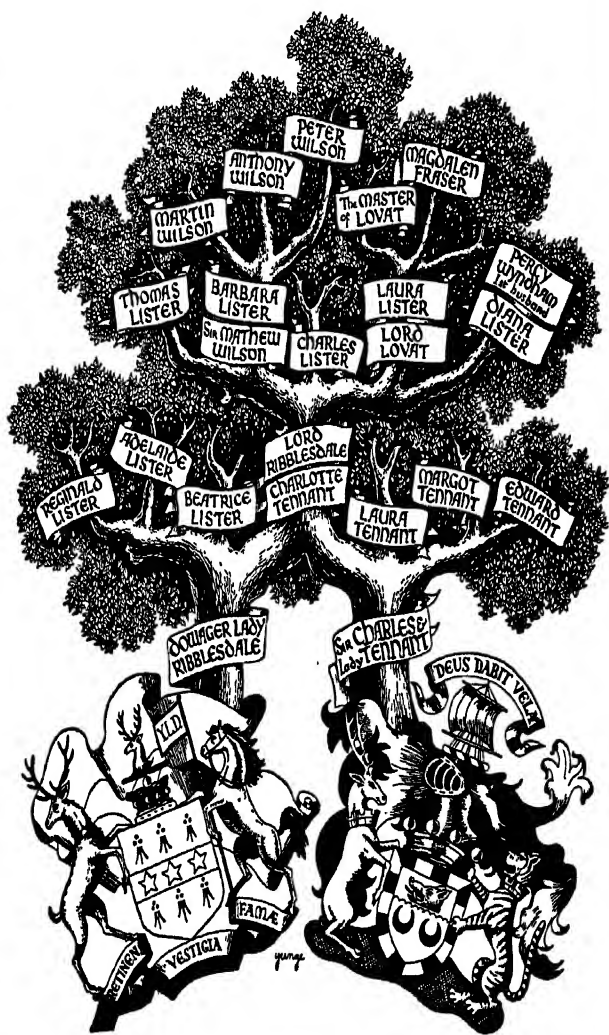
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DEAR YOUTH



DEAR YOUTH

BY
BARBARA WILSON

*"But ye, dear youth, who lightly in the hour of fury
Put on England's glory as a common coat"*

ROBERT BRIDGES

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FOREWORD

TO LAURA AND DIANA

DARLINGS, THIS BOOK is for you. It will mean more to you than to other readers. You will like it largely because it is about Zellie, and a little, I hope, because it is by me.

You will know without my telling you that the part which I call "Sophie" is drawn from my imagination, and perhaps from a few vague memories of what she told me about her life before she came to us. But it is entirely a work of fancy without foundation, and the characters are dream-people unrelated to any real ones.

She was a teacher from her early years; perhaps through the medium of this book she may be handing on her lessons to pupils unknown to her, if they will take the trouble to find her in its pages. She was ever the modest person you remember, the first to efface herself, the last to seek publicity, but if she thought it could help others to learn life's task I know she would be pleased to have it written. The example of her brave quiet spirit, the echo of her simple philosophy, may prove useful to "beginners."

We who knew her so well still often pause to remem-

FOREWORD

ber her when things are sad or bad. They grow easier to bear through the thought.

If we could add others to her schoolroom party she might be glad—who knows?

The born teacher loves to spread the rays of knowledge—the Grammar of Patience, the History of Selflessness, the Science of Love.

PART
ONE

SOPHIE

*“There is a Jewel which no Indian mines
Can buy, no chymic art can counterfeit:
It makes men rich in greatest poverty;
Makes water wine, turns wooden cups to gold,
The homely whistle to sweet music’s strain;
Seldom it comes, to few from heaven sent,
That much in little, all in nought—Content.”*

CHAPTER ONE

*"And Joy, whose hand is ever at his lips,
Bidding adieu."*

KEATS

SOON THERE WOULD BE no more room on the floor for the pink tarlatan *volants*. This is what Frau Finanzrath called the flounces, with the stress on the second syllable, and she should know, for she had once spent a week-end at Rheims, or maybe she was talking the Esperanto of dressmakers. The five-inch-wide lengths rippled from her sewing-machine, cascaded down the side of the work-table, and described lovely serpentines around her feet. The light frothy things were piling up above her shoe-straps to her ankles, to her knees almost; she worked quickly, as there was no time to lose. To-morrow the seamstress was coming, and these yards, nay kilometres, of tarlatan would be lightly stitched on to the ball gown. To each *volant* a *bouillonné*—more Esperanto. The old

seamstress would be here at 8.30: the day began early at Stuttgart. She could tack these trimmings with feather-weight fingers, all twisted with arthritis as they were. She had worked for the Bühler family so long that Frau Finanzrath could not remember when she first came to the Ludwigstrasse. In the last five years she had had ample experience in the making of tarlatan ball gowns for Anna and Marie. Now little Sophie, their sister, was to wear one at the Grün-Sonntag ball in the Leopold Saal, before she left the nest from which the other girls had flown. So these are not frills, but wings, old Johanna is making, pink muslin wings to carry Sophie across the frontier.

The bird herself sat perched under the green-shaded lamp. She was joining the flounces, not an arduous job, so while she sewed her mother was instructing her.

"Say the future of *aimer*; pronounce the R well in the throat—thus: *j'aimerai, tu aimeras, il aimera.*" Who can all these people be who are going to love? Sophie wondered.

The R was not quite satisfactory after all the coaching because there was too big a lump in Sophie's throat to make room for it. She would see Cousin Richard tomorrow, but not Monday. He had said he could not get away from the Bank to see her off in the train; anyway Mutter would not have liked this. It was a foolish affair, she said, calf love between cousins, and she did not take it seriously, but it was just as well that there should be no publicity about the boy and girl affair. The Finanz-

rath would have disapproved, it would have given rise to gossip at the *Amt*, and he was a stern man, intolerant of gossip and of love, though he had had nine children, or perhaps because he had had them. As soon as he was home from the Government office he put on his embroidered smoking-cap, and the dressmaking was spirited away to make room for *Abendbrot*, the supper of bread and butter rolls, with thin slices of sausage, and occasionally—in summer—salad and hardboiled eggs. At 9.30 tea was served. It came from daughter Louise in England, and was regarded as rare and precious as old brandy. When he was tired a thimbleful of schnapps was added to his milkless cup. The father's arrival occasioned a lull, for he was often tired, and always cross. Once a week his evening was spent away from the domestic hearth. How much Sophie enjoyed these evenings!

From the conjugation of French verbs Frau Finanzrath passed to other subjects. "Paris," she said, "has been called *la ville lumière*. King Henry of Navarre when asked to espouse the Catholic faith said, '*Paris vaut bien une messe*.' The residence of the Kings of France was at Versailles. It is outside the town (as it might be at Cannstadt). The Tuileries was the palace of the ill-fated Napoleon III before our glorious victories three years ago deprived him of his throne and of the Rhenish provinces. You remember the bonfires on the heights of Cannstadt when Paris fell to our brave soldiers? The siege lasted nine months, and the population of Paris were eating rats and mice—some say they were eating children, but

one can't believe all one hears—before the town surrendered.”

The maid Hedwig knocked at the door; she had come to lay table. She was a good girl, and Sophie was going to make her a present of her second-best hat before she started on her journey. It was a prune-coloured felt pork-pie, and had weathered three winters. This was the allotted span of life for all Bühler hats, but it was in a fair state of preservation, and would do the *Mädchen* good service, for she only went out once a month—on the first Sunday—and only for three hours. Sophie knew she envied it.

More wood was added to the stove; it crackled cheerfully behind the little iron door with its panels of thick glass. The fire shone through this, like the glowing eye of a sulky Cyclops. The green-shaded lamp was placed on the top of the upright Cramer piano. Cramer was a distant cousin of the Bühlers, and his instruments were made at Stuttgart. Sophie folded the flounces; they were gently laid to rest in silk paper. The lighting in the room had changed. Its beams now fell full on her small dark head and neat in-and-out profile. The fashion for short hair was becoming to her—to-morrow the *friseur* would come at six and dress it *à la Néron*, and in her pink tarlatan dress two hours later—it always took Herr Schmidt two hours to effect a coiffure—with a black velvet ribbon round the neck and a fan held in her glacé kid glove (four buttons), Sophie might be, would be in Richard's eyes, the belle of the ball in the Leopold Saal.

On this particular evening Sophie's father was mellow. It was, after all, his last evening with her. He talked with her quite a lot, with his knees crossed, as, playing pendulum with the uppermost leg, he balanced the mule she had embroidered for him two Christmases ago, on the ball of his foot. She blushed every time he addressed her; she had not got the habit of talking to her father. As he was so bland that night, so affable and gracious, Mother read aloud the last letter she had received from England. It was extracted from a rubber band which clasped the others, and though he had not heard it before, it was already thumbed and crumpled from constant reading. Louise wrote from London. She was describing the grandeur of the ducal house. The powdered footmen in their plush breeches and white stockings. The height of the building (60 feet). She had counted the steps which led to the schoolroom—110—and there was another floor above in which the housemaids slept. Colossal!

The Duchess had given several dinner-parties lately, though actually it was not the season. At one of these the Prince of Wales and his lovely Princess—Alexandra—had dined. The girls had been allowed to sit up in order to hang over the balustrade and see the distinguished visitors go in to dinner arm-in-arm. Her Grace wore her tiara of diamonds, and she looked like a fairy princess. But the Princess of Wales looked like the Fairy Queen, wrote Louise. "She is," added the *begeistert* young woman, "the most beautiful lady in the land."

Louise had been requested by the Duke to help the

boys, the letter continued, with their foreign languages during the holidays, but the sons of the Duke and Duchess did not like learning—they preferred shooting. The younger boys were more industrious; they wore sailor suits, white in the evening, which was extremely elegant (*fesch*), but Louise did not think that that meant they were going to be naval officers. All the English boys of a certain age wear these clothes. “I suppose it is to show that the English are proud of their fleet. It’s a pity that Germany has no fleet. ‘Rule, Britannia,’ is one of the songs they are fond of singing. I have taught them to sing some folk-songs, and one of my pupils can accompany herself in ‘*Liebchen ade, scheiden thut weh.*’ ” *Liebchen ade*—Sophie, who had not been listening, looked up. Her father was asleep. The pendulum foot was stilled, the embroidered mule had fallen to the ground. Her mother was replacing the thin sheet of foreign writing-paper under the india-rubber band.

There would be many adieus for Sophie on Monday—and all would give pain. But greater than the stab of parting was the Fear of the Unknown. It had ever filled her with dread. Here in the Ludwigstrasse was no place for unprobed emotions; all that came here was familiar, deep-rooted in time, deprived of the sting of unexpected joy or sorrow, accepted with folding of the hands to sleep. Birth, death, sickness, health, partings, reunion. And above this stoicism lay the pretty white icing of German sentimentality, like the sugar on the *Lebkuchen*, which, spicy and succulent, were made each year for this

season. And the cinnamon-stars too, they were already in the store cupboard, fragrant and Oriental, food for the Arabian Nights.

Sophie, with her eyes turned on the double windows, padded with baize bolsters to exclude the December air, could see a magnificent constellation hanging to the right of the needle spire of the Stiftskirche. A star, not a cinnamon-star, not even one of those which would deck the family tree on Christmas Eve after Sophie had gone away, just a cold blue crystal, pulsing perpetually when all above and below it was so still. The firmament, the church tower, the naked tree-tops, the huddled roofs, the lights in the attic windows, and the empty streets. Not quite empty, for her sister Julie's footsteps could be heard hurrying up theirs. Sophie was watching for Julie. She was later than usual this evening. The old Jewess had kept her lady companion another half-hour restoring order to some tangled tatting. Julie looked pretty in her fur cap, the straight "bang" of silky hair reaching her eyebrows gave her broad face a Cossack look. "*Ach Gott,*" she sighed as she entered, a little out of breath from the three flights of stairs. It was as if a dew-fresh rose was breathing in a sultry night. The *Wohnzimmer* was fever-hot, and it was freezing hard outside; to-morrow frost flowers would be traced on every window-pane, ghost-flowers, blooming at night only, lit by the beams of that blue-white star above the Stiftskirche.

Julie, still hungry, for the old Jewish magpie served a meagre supper, asked for a star nevertheless—a cinnamon-

star of course—before going to the bedroom she shared with Sophie, and munched it whilst her younger sister undressed. Sophie was humming “*Liebchen ade.*” “In two days I shall be gone, you will have this room to yourself. *Ach Gott*, I’m afraid!”

“Afraid!” The biscuit robbed Julie’s reply of the accent of contempt. “*Hasenfuss!*” (Hare-foot). “The world is so beautiful”: but when her gaze rested on Sophie in her calico and torchon-trimmed nightgown, something in the brown eyes, the childish tilted nose, the boyish hair, which awaited the *friseur*’s tongs on the morrow, caught at her heart.

“To-morrow I am free, I shall work at your pink tarlatan dress *all* day, it will be fairy-like . . . you will see. . . .” Then she blew out the candle. But the Volkslied tune persisted in Sophie’s troubled head. A pity that Louise in distant London had written about this one; there were so many others she could have mentioned.

*Liebchen ade,
Scheiden thut weh.*

Partings give pain.

CHAPTER TWO

“Sur toutes choses il (St. Michel) me disait
‘Sois bonne enfant, et Dieu t’aidera.’ ”

JOAN OF ARC, at her Trial

THERE HAD BEEN a sharp fall of snow the day Sophie left Stuttgart. It had drifted light and powdery in the open places of the town, not enough to cover the ground decently, but only to give it an ugly mottled appearance. An icy east wind blew the flakes restlessly about the streets.

Frau Finanzrath and Julie and Sophie stood shivering on the platform. The locomotive and coaches looked black and forbidding, the air was laden with unsavoury odours of smoke and grease.

“*Einsteigen!*” Sophie, at this command, clambered instantly into the second-class compartment, a “ladies only” which Frau Finanzrath had selected. Julie, carrying hand baggage, was on the point of following her, but the

mother protested: "You might be swept on by mistake; one cannot be too careful." So Sophie, single-handed, struggled with her two travelling-bags, and stood the wicker basket containing her biscuits, apples, small flask of *Eau des Carmes*, Waverley novel (in German), together with hand towel and a cake of soap, in the space beside the window. She sat down.

"Come and stand at the window, child," the Mamma ordered, and when her pale, ravaged face was framed in it, "Now don't forget, at Ulm you will stand this way (but not till the train is completely stationary), and you will agitate your handkerchief. Auntie Olga will see you, and you will give her messages from me. If the train is punctual you will have ten minutes with her. At Würzburg you must again take up this position; it is possible that Cousin Fritz and his youngest daughter Gretel may find time to come and greet you. Cover your head well with your bashelik against the cold air. You will not be able to sleep, most probably, but the night will pass, and you can keep your eyes shut. At the Gare de l'Est to-morrow morning the Countess's maid will meet you. I have described how you are dressed—your plaid black-and-white dolman and blue hat—so remember to take off the red bashelik, or this might mislead her. You have the Countess's address in your handbag?—Good. Should she fail to find you, take a *droshke*, I mean a *fiacre*, and drive directly to the house. Leave your registered luggage; it will be recovered later in the day. Tell Cousin Fritz that I am sending him a

parcel of *Lebkuchen* before Christmas. Perhaps you won't see the Cousin Fritz; he might be at the Klinik. . . ."

Sophie was crying softly, and there was the glint of tears on Julie's eyelashes. Frau Finanzrath, erect and calm, with her bonnet a trifle awry from the persistent drive of the east wind, raised her hand to smooth her banded hair. It held a few strands of silver, but her face was strangely unlined, strong-featured and fresh.

Julie was looking at Sophie's travelling companion, a sour-faced woman in the opposite corner wearing heavy widow's weeds. Her sharp glance rested disapprovingly on Sophie's back.

"Does your compartment feel well heated? Keep the windows to, except when you are talking to Aunt Olga and Cousin Fritz. But then perhaps you may not see them! Christmas is a busy time. Take three drops of *Eau des Carmes* on a lump of sugar—you have those lumps of sugar, I put them in the handbag?—as soon as you feel sick. One often feels sick on a journey, it means nothing; the Papa always . . ."

A prolonged fanfare on a trumpet announced that the train was starting. Julie ran forward to hold Sophie's hand, but her mother held her back. "*Auf Wiedersehen*, dear child!" she called, and Julie threw kisses with both hands. "Get back from the window. Close it, close it instantly!" shouted Frau Finanzrath, and Sophie obeyed. A piercing whistle drowned all later words, and a cloud of black smoke blew across, obscuring everything. The train, an uncouth serpent, appeared to shake its scales, as

with noisy pulsings and pantings it writhed out of the shed.

"We must get home quick," said Julie's mother. "Your father will be waiting for his tea." And so he was.

Sophie's tears were raining down so fast that they splashed on to her mantle: she let them fall unheeded and held her handkerchief in her clasped hands. After a few minutes they stopped, as the tears of a child cease, the reservoir of sorrow apparently exhausted. The crêpe-wreathed woman in the opposite corner was watching her. Those vigilant eyes may have dried up the spate of tears. They travelled in silence through the ink-dark night.

After what appeared an eternity to Sophie, she cleared her throat to ask timidly, "Pardon me, but can you tell me when we reach Ulm?" The stranger answered in a metallic voice with a marked foreign accent that the journey usually occupied one and a half hours. Sophie drew her watch from her waist-belt; another forty-five minutes and they would be there. Not that she wished to see Auntie Olga, her father's sister, one of those many relations practically unknown to her, but the halt would break this awful silence made hideous by the thunder of the train. She shut her eyes as her mother had told her to, and her eyelids seemed unable to lie still. They twitched and flickered miserably, and every now and again opened involuntarily. The widow's eyes closed more securely.

When the screeching of the brakes announced that

they were about to reach the next stop, Sophie blew her nose strenuously and wiped her face; some smuts were smeared down one pale cheek. Her brow was a little damp. She drew the handkerchief across it and attempted to straighten her fringe. The curls of the *Néron* coiffure had come out, and wisps of hair hung lankly round her ears and above her soft shadowy eyebrows. The sudden drawing-up of the train threw her violently forwards. Her goloshed feet trod on the black trailing skirts of her travelling companion. "*Mon Dieu!*" hissed the relict, and Sophie uttered a conscience-stricken "*Verzeihung*" as she rose to take a long survey of the platform. It appeared entirely deserted except for a few railway officials in impeccable uniform. Sophie let down the window a few careful inches, and pushing her arm through, waved the handkerchief forlornly. It yielded no results. A ticket-collector smiled at her, and a barrow heaped with apples and *Backwerk* was wheeled past the compartment. Sophie, desperate, let down more window, stretched her shoulders through the opening, and called out "*Tante Olga!*" Her voice met no reply; and indeed how could it, for by this time the few passengers who had debouched from the train had evacuated the station, and the dismal tooting of the signal of departure had sounded its warning note.

"She hasn't come," said Sophie out loud, and a fresh sense of desolation gripped her heart.

"Who?" snapped the unknown lady.

"My aunt. Mamma said she would."

"Then please shut the window; there is a terrible current of air, and the snow will blow in." Her request was complied with, and the train settled back into its thunderous gait.

The little oil-lamp in the centre of the compartment burned dimly, and the flush on Sophie's face died away. Her head ached furiously. With trembling fingers she uncorked the bottle of *Eau des Carmes* and attempted to shake three drops of the cordial on to a lump of sugar, but much more dribbled on to her fingers and her skirt. What waste! She scrunched the piece of sugar between her teeth, and felt the slow burn of liqueur as she gulped it down. Then once more she closed her eyes and attempted to woo sleep.

She was living backwards, living acutely in the hours spent in the Leopold Saal. And earlier still, through the afternoon of that day. It was five o'clock on Sunday evening when the pink tarlatan dress was lying on the bed, placed there with tender hands by Julie. The last stitch had been fixed; the flounces still warm from the flat-iron were delicately resting on layers of tissue-paper. They were fresh as the petals of a flower before the sun has reached its meridian. Sophie in a cotton wrapper was receiving the ministrations of the *friseur*. Tier after tier, in awful symmetry, the nut-brown curls rose from the nape of her neck to the crown of her head. From that point they described other convolutions, and bunched sideways and downwards, less regular but as abundant. Curls, curls everywhere. Nero in his palmiest days, be-

fore he had acquired that fatal virtuosity with his violin, could never have possessed so many. The rounded locks were warm from the tongs, just as the *volants* were tepid from the caress of the flat-iron. Julie discharged Herr Schmidt with two marks fifty, and laced Sophie into the ball gown. Mamma snapped the clasp of the narrow black velvet at the neck.

"So, you look *wunderschön*! Fine feathers make fine birds."

The Finanzrath and his wife accompanied their daughter. It was embarrassing to go out thus with Papa when he was dressed so fine—white cravat, *moiré* braid on his folding pince-nez, and patent leather elastic-sided boots. Sophie was more conscious of his smart clothes than she was of her own. Dear Mother wore her Spanish lace shawl over a purple *faille* gown, a combination which was familiar.

The Saal was crowded. Sophie knew almost everybody and "Good-evening" was given to each in turn, accompanied by a maidenly bob and a smirk. The guests lined the room. Each new arrival completed the circle of handshakes, and the crowd thickened till it was three or four deep. At nine o'clock the orchestra struck up the first polka.

"*Darf ich bitten?*" (May I request?). That was the formula, and Richard with a click of the heels bowed low to Sophie.

"*Ach, Richard!*" she sighed, and in another second his arm was round her waist.

"No more, Cousin, I am giddy." But he would not stop, and the tarlatan *volants* nodded and flopped furiously, the curls shook out; the colour in her cheeks deepened, while the violins pizzicatoed their maddening measure, and the drops fell from the trembling wax candles in the sconces.

What a night it was—a night of nights! She remembered a vortex of muslin skirts, a riot of light and warmth, the fragrance of punch and flowers mixed, and a pulsing rhythm of sound. Above the music, voices, perpetual greetings, decorous addresses, the flirting of ivory fans, the clink of glasses brought together.

Other heels were clicked before her, various blond heads ducked and mazurkas and valsees followed polkas, but Richard kept returning, kept requesting, kept circling her light form, though he did not say much, nor did she. She was too dizzy, too much out of breath, till the room began to clear, as the elder people had collected round the buffet, then on some trivial pretext he had led her into the embrasure of a window where muslin draperies half concealed them.

"Sophie, you are not going for long? Sophie, come back soon; Sophie, don't run away."

She thought she had said, "*Ach du*, Cousin, you know it's not my wish; I can't bear leaving." Or had she said, "I can't bear leaving you"—which had she murmured? It was impossible to remember. She tried hard with screwed-up eyes to see his face exactly—exactly as it had looked at that moment. A wide, good face, with golden

eyelashes and firm red lips. His eyes were pale-blue and short-sighted, and above one cheekbone ran the deep score left there by a student's sword. No, he was not handsome; the sisters laughed at him. "Poor old Richard, fat-head Richard, just like him." Easy to say that, but had he looked at them as he looked at Sophie in the Leopold Saal?

The violins began to wail. This time it was the "Blue Danube." "Come, Sophie, *darf ich bitten?*" They were off like the wind and in a whirlpool of twirling skirts he held her fast. Skirts cut in scallops, festoons, and vandycks; edged with lace, velvet, and silk; trimmed with ribbon and flowers. Green skirts, blue skirts, white. Sophie's was the only pink tarlatan dress. Near the end of the evening they returned to the window and he kissed her hand. "Then it's goodbye to-night—really goodbye." She had closed her eyes, because she was so giddy of course, and he had added, "So it's really *Liebchen ade, scheiden thut weh.*"

"We must get home quick." Frau Finanzrath had found her. "Your father has gone out to fetch a *droschke.*"

If only Sophie could recollect what she had replied to Cousin Richard!

The train had stopped at Würzburg. Was it worth while looking for Cousin Fritz and Gretel, as Aunt Olga had disappointed? Did she dare let down the window again? She was still hesitating, when the door of the compartment was thrown open and two youngish-

looking men stepped in. This was entirely unexpected, the carriage was marked "Ladies Only." They were smoking—this too was against the regulations: the window bore a "non-smoker" label. They gave Sophie an appraising glance, spread-eagled themselves on the seat opposite, and started talking in French. Sophie threw two or three despairing glances up and down the station. The halt, she knew, was a brief one. A heavily overcoated figure wearing a Tyrolese hat was patrolling the train; he was close up to her now. Might it be he? She did not dare risk pronouncing his name till his fierce blond moustache, dewed with thawed snow-flakes, all but brushed the window, he was peering so close into every second-class compartment. Finally she decided to hail him.

"Du, Cousin Fritz?" The burly doctor started.

"So there you are, child! I've had a nice job finding you up and down this blasted train; why couldn't you come out on to the platform and wave a handkerchief? How are things going? Your father as grumpy as ever, I suppose, and the poor mother striving to give all you girls a start in the world. Well, well, such is life. I'm glad I've only got my little Grete. She couldn't come to see you—far too cold. What do you say? your mother is sending us *Backwerk*—quite unnecessary. She had better keep them to feed all the hungry mouths at home. My housekeeper has made our Christmas cakes, but they are horrid things; they affect the liver. It's years since I've eaten a *Lebkuchen*. My thesis on the liver is just about to

be published at Leipsic: the Faculty expressed a wish for it. Professor Engelmann wrote to me in the most gratifying terms when he obtained my consent. Where are you going to, by the way? Paris? I don't suppose the French are feeling very friendly towards us. That was a good joke of the Iron Chancellor's about the indemnity they have got to pay us. 'Leave them nothing but their eyes to weep with,' he said. I'd better be going now. Adieu, Sophie; have a good journey. *Auf Wiedersehen.*"

He had gone. She saw the little fat crease of red neck between his upturned fur-lined coat-collar and the brim of his rakish green felt hat, as he passed by an oil-lamp into the gloom and fog.

That was Cousin Fritz. But who were these strange men opposite her? She felt a sudden wave of affection for the beady-eyed widow. They were companions in misfortune, for it was nothing less than misfortune to have acquired such unsought-for company. To her surprise, the lady, who must have been none other than tall Agrippa's wife, dipped into the inkstand as he was in *Struwwelpeter*, seemed to have brightened up considerably since their advent. She was bridling, and exchanging occasional remarks in French with them so fast as to be completely unintelligible to Sophie, but somehow she knew that she was being held up to ridicule. Cousin Fritz's words could not have popularised her either.

"*Asseyez-vous, Mademoiselle Boche!*" said one of the young men, as he put his arm round Sophie's waist and dragged her from the window, almost pulling her down on to his

lap. She crimsoned. The widow and the other youth laughed uproariously.

"What's in the basket?" he enquired. "Have you brought refreshment for this party?" He lifted the lid and began unpacking it. "Apples—the apples of discord, or is it Eve's apple? The woman tempted him. Your eyes tempt me. Will you give me a kiss, fair enemy? Shall we pretend that this is the Garden of Eden?" He was speaking more slowly now, and she understood him. The others continued to laugh. The bottle emerged. "Ha, ha! food *and* drink I see." He read the label: "*Eau des Carmes*—so you're a Carmelite? Not *my* idea of a Carmelite nun. Perhaps you've escaped from your convent and want to see a bit of life. Well, we'll initiate you.—Liqueur?" He uncorked it and sniffed. "Delicious! '*A la guerre comme à la guerre*' (any drink is better than no drink). To your very good health, Miss Boche." He put the little glass flask to his lips, tasted the contents, and made a wry face. "Disgusting! You should have prepared a better vintage for your guests. But what is it your square-heads sing?—'*Wein, Weib und Gesang*.' The wine is disappointing, but the woman is delicious." He threw his arm round her shoulders. "And now for song. Madame, Monsieur, will you join in it with me?" And in a charming light tenor voice he began to hum, "*Partant pour la Syrie, le jeune et beau Benoît.*"

The little basket assaulted, raped, fell on to the floor. The apples rolled there after it; the paper-bound Waverley novel, crumpled and torn, lay at the young

man's feet, while Sophie's tormentor still held her against him. With the other arm he pretended to conduct the singing. She struggled to free herself—then burst out crying.

Mrs. Agrippa, who had enjoyed the fun, now protested. "Leave the poor child alone; it's not funny" (then why had she laughed?). "Pick up her apples, and let's have some sleep. It's late." The circus was over; the clown calmed down. But sleep was far from Sophie.

Hour after hour she leaned back, trying to keep those fluttering eyelids of hers closed. Every now and again a tear beneath them brimmed over, smarting painfully and wetting the lashes. At first she did not dare look at the inquisitor, did not know how close he was to her; but when she summoned courage to steal a furtive glance, he had left her side of the compartment, and was sitting very close to the widow. Thank God, thank God! In the grey hours of the morning they reached Paris. Her travelling companions ignored her utterly, and almost before the train drew up in the Gare de l'Est they had evacuated the compartment and she was alone.

CHAPTER THREE

*"Mein Kind, wir waren Kinder,
Zwei Kinder jung und froh."*

HEINE

MARCEL HAD COME to the station. When she got to know him better she always thought of Marcel as a hedgehog. It was not only that his damp concierge's lodge suggested the nidus of such a prickly pet, but his hunched shoulders, hair *à la brosse*, sharp features, and superhumanly bright eyes reminded her of one. He made contact with Sophie instantly, and it seemed only a few minutes before she was driving along the streets inside a *fiacre* with Marcel outside and her registered luggage, *dédouané* by his rapid efficiency, on the roof. She began to feel a little restored, and indeed to arrive anywhere after such a journey would have been a relief.

The cab rolled as if the yellow wheels were coming off at every turn. She lurched, and it lurched, and the sorry

nag harnessed to it appeared in equal danger of rolling over on to its side. Many times Sophie thought she had arrived, or that the horse was stopping, the death-rattle in his throat, to breathe his last, but the burly coachman of the Compagnie Urbaine in his shiny papier-mâché top-hat sat motionless. His halts were temperamental, and it was not till he had driven into the courtyard of the house in the rue des Ecuries d'Artois that he dismounted—to spit and to swear.

A man-servant wearing a snowy apron below a striped livery waistcoat answered the shrill little bell from the lodge; the front door opened. Here the hedgehog-concierge had done with her. He was paying the coachman, or rather he was trying to compound with him.

The hall of No. 35 was sombre, airless, smelly—a wooden staircase writhed between its dark panelled walls. Sophie followed the servant up the well-waxed wooden steps—two flights. He threw open the door of a back bedroom which looked on to an exiguous patch of garden and many oddments of roof and outbuilding beyond.

"I will fetch the coffee—the luggage will be brought up later," the *valet de chambre* said.

Sophie's fastness henceforth was here within these four thinly painted grey walls. The Empire bed she was to occupy almost filled one half of the floor space: two chairs, a wardrobe, a washstand, and a *prie-dieu* the rest. A crucifix hung over the mantelpiece. The room was very clean and threadbare. She stood at the window and watched the sky. It did not look like the Stuttgart

sky, but she supposed it was the same. Extremely high up and pellucid, as if a light invisible was shining behind and through it. She saw some pigeons fly past, and their arrow-head shapes looked as sharply defined, as detailed, as if they were quite close to her. "It's because of the clear air," she reasoned to herself when she sat down to her rolls and coffee. As she brushed the crumbs off her dusty skirt Gabrielle knocked at the door.

She had so often pictured her first pupil, but she had never thought of her like this: the long ringlets reaching the waist, the dark many-pleated double skirt, tight bodice, white linen collar and cuffs. She had not been prepared for anything so elegant and yet so young. The greeting was free of all shyness.

After some conventional phrases Gabrielle suggested that Sophie should see the house, and Sophie was too tired to decline. They wandered to the ground floor, inspected the dining-room and *bibliothèque*. On the first floor was the drawing-room, and "*le boudoir de Maman*." The rooms appeared to Sophie very sumptuous with their ormolu furniture, Aubusson floor coverings, crystal chandeliers, and brocade-covered walls. She murmured "*Wunderschön!*" quite mechanically as each door was opened or shut.

When they were back on Sophie's floor Gabrielle preceded her gaily. "And now for the pick of the house, the best thing in it, the sweetest, the prettiest, you have got to come to my room. Follow me, but on tiptoe; maybe he sleeps." She turned the handle quietly and

pushed Sophie through the opening. On a fresh-looking *toile-de-Jouy* bed a large tortoise-shell Persian cat lay blinking in the sun. Its whiskers twitched convulsively; so did the long dark hairs (like the finest antennae of an insect) above the yellow eyes with slits of pupils which fastened on the girls. Sophie gave an uncontrolled scream.

"*Ach Gott, eine Katze!*"—she clasped her hands in horror, for Sophie was one of those people who feel a nameless terror at the sight of a cat. Gabrielle, besotted with love for her pussy, gathered the heavy Tom into her arms and proffered it to her; Sophie retreated, terrified.

"Say *bonjour*, my adored one," Gabrielle murmured, burying her face in the soft fur ruff.

"No, no, take him away! I'm frightened."

The French girl, startled, deposited Minet on the ground. The Persian arched its back, stretched itself, and advanced, mincing, with padded feet in the direction of Sophie.

"*Mein Gott, allez-vous-en! Geb fort.*"

"Mademoiselle, he will not hurt you; he has a perfect character. You will learn to love him. He is so warm and comfortable on one's bed. To-morrow he will come into your room and make friends with you, just wait and see; he may be a little timid at first. We'll leave him here at present, for you must come and rest. After *déjeuner* we'll visit Grand'mère. She lives in this house, behind the glass swing-door on the ground floor."

Youth is resilient. By luncheon time Sophie was made

over. She appeared dimpled and smiling, in her black-and-white polonaise with a royal-blue tie at her throat. The fit was not perfect. Old Johanna, creator of the pink tarlatan, had less cunning for the fashioning of cloth day dresses, but the fresh colour of the wearer, her faithful hazel eyes and tip-tilted nose, made up for the defective shoulder-seams and the wrinkles across the waist.

Grand'mère was already installed in the dining-room: she sat waiting for her daughter-in-law, tapping her fork on the menu slate.

The young Countess, Gabrielle's mother, had no time to disrobe, and shepherded the two girls in to luncheon without removing her fur-trimmed dolman and bonnet.

"*Bonjour, ma mère!*"—she printed two light kisses on the old lady's prominent cheekbones—"quelle joie!" But was it all joy, Sophie wondered, to have that old sphinx of a mother-in-law at the family party? She was as terrifying as Minet, as eerie, feline, and suspicious. The radiant Comtesse de la Montemar played her in vain for a smile or an indulgence; again and again in her continuous babble she delicately sketched a compliment in reply to the old lady's querulous interrogations. The octogenarian threw out her sharp words as if she enjoyed spitting these poison pellets about. Gabrielle, unmoved, confident that at any moment she could turn the gall to honey by addressing her granny, bided her time. When finally she spoke the old woman's eyes softened, the corners of that sour mouth curled upwards, she leaned towards the girl with the brooding gesture of love—

"*Mon chat*" (Sophie wished that they would not talk so much about cats here; to possess one was more than enough), "*tu vas goûter demain chez Grand'mère, hein?*" And Gabrielle, challenging and self-possessed, nodded her head so that the ringlets bobbed. Then the talk found other channels; but it was all of Gabrielle, her new winter coat, the skates she might need should this hard frost continue, the tisane she must drink daily to preserve her from bronchial colds after the early walk in the Bois on sunny mornings at the approach of the Jour de l'An and the *étrennes* it would bring her.

Bertrand's name came up later. Sophie was sufficiently sensitive to realise that this theme was a less happy one. Grand'mère stiffened; the little bright beacons of temper flared in her deep-set eyes. She even seemed to change colour: her face, like an ancient Japanese *nizaki*, assumed a deeper yellow shade. Her lace mantilla vibrated threateningly. "He was first in his class, my dear child, remember."

"Yes, but that was three months ago. Nothing but bad marks since then."

"You must not press him; he is growing so fast, the poor boy will have meningitis. His father was just the same. His health was very precarious till he reached the age of twenty-one." (She whispered something.)

"You are too indulgent, *ma mère*; I assure you both Melchior and I are worried by the reports of his masters. His military service begins next year, and according to his professors he is wasting his time at the *Lycée*."

"I refuse to believe it. Ever since the war there has been a tendency in schools to disparage those who belong to families like ours. There is no necessity for the boy to work when he is grown to manhood. He will share your fortune—and mine—the estate at Cabours will be his in time, he will marry a well-brought-up, well-dowered little *bourgeoise*, and bring us all happiness."

The subject was closed. The old lady rinsed her mouth out of the blue tumbler of water perfumed with peppermint standing in the finger-bowl, spat vigorously into it, and 'pushed her dessert-plate from her. Her ebony stick was handed to her by the man-servant, and the lunchers adjourned.

"Bertrand is my brother," Gabrielle whispered to Sophie as their gaze followed the old woman out of the dining-room and down the corridor to the glass swing-door. Sophie watched the limping gait, and the fairy-tale impression strengthened. The misshapen form before her was the figure of an elderly fairy, a malignant fairy, carrying an all-powerful wand; one whose incantations might change Sophie into Cinderella, or Marcel the concierge into a real hedgehog, and the cat (oh, my God, there was a cat upstairs; she had forgotten that!) into a Prince Charming.

Sophie did not know which frightened her most, Grandmother or the cat. Both had eyes which flickered with smouldering hatred. At any moment the flame could leap in them—dreadful altars, waiting for a burnt-offering. Who would be sacrificed? Not Gabrielle,

not Bertrand, not their father. Perhaps the young Countess, or perhaps Sophie. At the swing-door Grand'mere turned to throw a question at her daughter-in-law.

"You and Melchior are dining *en ville*?"

"Oui, *ma mère*."

En ville, that was the first Parisian French she learned. Henceforth she would hear it frequently, and write it on the envelopes of the letters she addressed for Gabrielle or her mother. *En ville* meant Paris—*la ville lumière*, of which (as her mother had taught her) Henry IV had said, "*Paris vaut bien une messe*." Sophie had been present at many masses but she had only seen one Paris. She did not know whether to love or fear *en ville*. It was dangerous, she realised, like the fairy grandmother, and the tortoise-shell cat, but more fascinating than they.

Gabrielle showed Paris to her in the following weeks. They walked along the quays which bordered the Seine; she raised her eyes to the huge squareness of the towers of Notre Dame, to the outline of the Sainte Chapelle which throws skywards its delicate spire, looking for all the world like a flower that has sprung out of a bulb. She had breathed "*Ach Gott*" at the charred ruins of the Tuileries (only three years since the Commune had wrought this havoc, razed them to the ground, and with them had fallen the pomp and circumstance of the Third Napoleon). She felt conscience-stricken and contrite before these tumbled fragments. Was it the aftermath of the Franco-Prussian war? She substituted "*Mon Dieu!*" for "*Ach Gott*," and hoped she had not been overheard.

But there was no one to listen, only two dejected little men who were fishing forlornly in the river. They looked as if they were part of this landscape, the grey stretch of water, the darker grey embankment, the small fine rain which was falling from black-grey clouds above. Further on the flamboyant beauty of the Pavillon de Flore joined the long outline of the Louvre—a superb courtesan, unscathed, an appanage of the throne of France.

Sophie learnt to know the little sinuous streets which thread the neighbourhood of the Faubourg St. Honoré where she lived, filled with excited voices, hurrying footsteps, and street vendors. Her ears became familiar with the pedlars' cries, "*Voilà le beau radis noir.*" Black radishes sounded a most sinister foodstuff—fit only for malignant fairies, or for Grand'mère. "*Raccommodez les chaises . . . e.*" The crier pushed his barrow from house to house until he found a chair to cane, and started his work on the pavement.

Occasionally they shopped in one of the *Grands Magasins*, and Sophie, who had not got the habit of big stores, feasted her eyes on the magnificence of their merchandise. Such silks and velvets, such failles and taffetas! Colours she had not dreamed of which bore strange names—"Bismarck," "Vert du Nil," "Lie de vin," "Fumée de Londres." Best of all she liked shopping in the flower market of the Madeleine. In the shadow of the pseudo-classical temple the booths stretched in long alignments, and the flower-women sang the praises of their wares. "*Le beau lilas, roses de la Côte d'Azur, mimosa, violettes de*

Parme, œillets. Fleurissez-vous, Mesdames!" The buxom vendors, like highwaymen, would hold them up, to pin a bloom into the girls' coats. But flowers were dear at this season, and Sophie could not afford to buy a bloom. She had to content herself with the sight of an azalea in a pot, pink and white as a ballerina, with a *tutu* made of the paper wrappings, which she had to carry home for the Countess's salon on the afternoon when she received.

CHAPTER FOUR

"Il faut donner à la vie sa confiance entière,
elle a des ressources inépuisables."

Quoted (from memory) from

"Mon père avait raison."

SACHA GUITRY

BERTRAND RESEMBLED HIS FATHER—tall and thin, with stooping shoulders and an intelligent brow. Sophie enjoyed his exaggerated courtesy. She had never been treated like this; the door flung open for her, her fallen handkerchief picked up—all this with the flourish of a gallant. She blushed every time he addressed her and when, to her surprise, she saw him kiss each day his mother's hand.

Bertrand, like a bewildering elusive moth, appeared only during the hours of darkness. He had gone to the *Lycée* before Sophie left her room in the morning, and he did not return till the time of *goûter*. At five a *répétiteur* arrived to help him with his home-work, and directly after dinner another teacher, often the Abbé Lavallier, was closeted with him till bedtime.

The priest filled her Calvinist soul with misgivings. He was part of the medieval mystery of this house; and it was a house of mystery, in which people lived curiously separate existences. The Count, like Bertrand, was rarely visible. His appearances, as far as Sophie was concerned, were chiefly at *déjeuner*, and he flashed past her occasionally in the courtyard, on foot, or in his little single-horse coupé. He was a man of delicate melancholy and romantic appearance; she always felt his French was better than that of others. When he spoke the phrase was admirably turned, and smooth as polished agate. He could peel a pear with the accuracy of a lathe, and she liked to watch his pale nervous hands with the heavy cameo ring on the little finger, engaged on the task. He wiped his silky black moustache with a flourish of his napkin, and addressed his daughter and wife, bending his dark brows towards them, breathing paternal devotion and uxorious attachment. With Gabrielle he adopted a playful tone, and observed her fine points as if he were appraising a filly on the race-course.

Sometimes he spoke of politics at the luncheon-table, and then Sophie trembled; but usually it was of the food—Albert had *raté* the sauce, the spinach contained too much salt, the meat was over-cooked. But these were the comments of a hyper-critic; the chef at 35 rue des Ecuries d'Artois was an artist.

Grand'mère's life naturally was detached from the others. Segregated as she was in her three little rooms on the *rez-de-chaussée*, the glass door cut her off as com-

pletely from those on the other side as if it had been the Atlantic. Frequently she ate in her own apartments, marooned by an indisposition. This, then, was the subject at *déjeuner*.

“*Ma mère est souffrante aujourd’hui,*” one of Gabrielle’s parents would say, and curious remedies were resorted to. Her chest had been blistered by the doctor, from which she had obtained relief; a tisane of cherry-stalks had yielded excellent results. A foot-bath containing seaweed had been used; slices of lemon had been laid on her temples to calm the headache. But the old lady always rose like a phoenix from her bed, and reappeared a few days later as highly charged with ill-humour as before, as petulant with the Countess, as maudlin with Gabrielle. Sophie felt she was ignored by everybody, and on the whole this contented her.

After several months of this spiritual isolation, the Easter holidays began, and Bertrand had more leisure. It was decided that he should improve the shining hours of April weather by rubbing up his German with Sophie. The coaching was to take place in the *bibliothèque* during the afternoons, while Gabrielle was practising in the drawing-room above. At first the work proceeded smoothly. Sophie, blushing all the time, bent over Ollendorff’s Grammar with him, whilst seated at the wide secretaire which faced the window on the garden. The true teacher’s blood which ran in her veins was stimulated by the vagaries of irregular verbs and nouns. One day Minet, who had been prowling in the garden,

leapt on to the window-sill and, with his unblinking yellow eyes, peered in on them. Minet had embittered Sophie's existence sufficiently. He terrified her genuinely, and Gabrielle had been kind in keeping the two apart. But for Bertrand here was an opportunity of breaking the thread of lessons.

"Poor cat; he's cold, I'll let him in," he said, rising to unfasten the latch.

"No, for Heaven's sake leave him where he is."

"Why? He is asking for permission to enter so prettily."

She did not dare admit her fear.

The casement was flung wide, and Minet gracefully jumped on to the writing-desk. Sophie rose to her feet, Grammar in hand.

"*Comment*, you do not like him?" quizzed Bertrand, fondling the throbbing throat.

"I . . . hate him, I hate cats."

"But one should not hate God's creatures. Cats are as useful as they are ornamental. Surely you prefer them to mice, or rats? Now you never know where you may get mice; they are everywhere, in the skirting, behind the furniture. Minet always finds them. There may be a mouse below your petticoat at this very moment, who knows? Shall we ask him to look?"

He popped the huge Tom on to the floor. It started at once to sidle up to Sophie's velvet-bordered polonaise; she sprang aside and dropped the Grammar, to shoo it away with both hands. Bertrand, seizing the wide hem

of her gown, swung it this way and that to call the cat's attention. "*Viens, Minet, search for the naughty mice; they may be under this, in fact I think I feel them.*" He had caught one of Sophie's small white-stockinged feet and held it fast. Sophie began to scream, whilst the tabby, unconcerned but following Bertrand's blandishments, padded up gingerly to join him. Now Bertrand held her ankle, immobilising her. Scream followed scream, whilst upstairs the Chopin Raindrop Prelude was being hammered over by Gabrielle; *she* could not hear them but Grand'mère could.

In one final effort to free herself Sophie had fallen on her knees, and Bertrand, sprawling over her, was struggling to raise her when the old Countess entered. The cat, bored by these antics, brushed through the open door and made for the kitchen.

"So this is how you learn German, Bertrand," she minced. "My congratulations. No wonder your school reports leave nothing to be desired. Mademoiselle Bühler, you must find him an apt pupil. You say it was the cat, a time-honoured excuse! Poor Minet, he should have *bon dos* to bear such an accusation, I do not find him so menacing: *bon dos* when he makes *gros dos*, that's a good joke. Your father must hear of this. The instructress shall in future be chaperoned. She needs protection from the cat—and others. The writing-table is all upset. Please tidy it before you continue your studies. You might decline '*Meine gute Katze, meiner guten Katze,*' etc." She had a peculiarly offensive accent in German, and

Sophie wilted. Another minute and she was gone. The two young people gazed at each other shamefacedly.

"It was my fault," murmured Sophie. "Cats give me heart palpitations."

"So they do me," Bertrand replied.

There was no animosity between them. Indeed the scene seemed to have created an amicable understanding.

As Bertrand was rearranging the knick-knacks on the *escritoire* he held out a framed photograph to her.

"Do you admire that face? It is the Baroness de Bignon. She is my father's friend."

"I have not seen her here," said Sophie.

"You are not likely to. She is the mistress of my father. What is 'mistress' in German?" The lesson was resumed.

But because of this unfortunate incident those that followed were differently conducted. They took place in Grand'mère's *rez-de-chaussée* room. Teacher and student sat on two inhospitable cane-seated chairs placed by a card-table, and the old lady in a *bergère* by the fire dozed and invigilated alternately over her crochet. It was not safe to count on these naps of hers. Once or twice the reckless Bertrand to amuse himself had inserted a phrase which was not germane to the text in hand. Once or twice he would work a sentence of his own into the middle of a piece of prose translation, thus:

"The long-desired object which Napoleon had cherished for so many years appeared now to be well within his grasp. He had decided to risk all on this last

desperate venture, and the winter of (here Bertrand departed on an extravaganza of his own) 1874 saw the arrival in Paris of Fräulein Sophie Bühler, a delicious young German lady, pretty, witty and good-natured. Bertrand de Montemar soon fell a victim to her charms."

Sophie, on thorns, made furious gestures of rebuke, but he persisted. She cast a terrified look in Grand'mère's direction. The Countess's eyes were closed, but was it only feigned sleep? Bertrand continued: "Napoleon possibly, Bertrand certainly, would have sacrificed all to obtain a kiss from those sweet lips." Sophie felt dizzy with apprehension. Bertrand's mischievous glance darted from his teacher to his granny. Pitiless, he pursued his way till a torrent of asthmatic coughing interrupted him.

"Very good, my boy, you are making good progress, and so apparently is Fräulein Bühler." Strangely enough the old lady seemed to bear them no ill-will. Sophie even fancied that she was more friendly towards her at the end of that day's lesson.

Before the month of May came in, Sophie's sister, governess to the Segelmann children who were spending the winter on the Riviera, returned to Paris. It seemed too good to be true to have her here. Anna had been three years in France, and Sophie had not seen her since she left Stuttgart.

She lived in the Boulevard de Courcelles, in an apartment loaded with bronzes and gilt, velvet superimposed on satin, ormolu on marble, Pelion on Ossa. Anna, to Sophie's disappointment, had become completely frenchi-

fied. Prettiest of all the Bühler sisters, she had taken full advantage of her sojourn in Paris. All trace of her adolescence in the Ludwigstrasse had been washed away. She wore her bonnet jauntily on the coronet of her blond hair—"un beau casque de cheveux," old Segelmann had described her coiffure; her "dress-improver" accentuated her round waist, and the graceful line of her back. Sophie felt the pangs of Cinderella in the presence of a proud sister. The two Segelmann children, Yvonne and Germaine, scarce able to move under their rich pelisses, fascinated her. She joined them, when she had an hour to spare, in their walks in the Parc Monceau, where with other Jewish children they sunned themselves on sandy paths, against a background of rainbow fountains and bursting chestnut buds.

The winter was over, the chrysalis forms of the dark months were clothing themselves with the butterfly wings of early summer. Barrows of lilies-of-the-valley from the woods of Marly, St. Germain, and Vincennes were being pushed along the streets. *Fraises des bois* appeared on the luncheon-table. Pale-green chairs encumbered the pavement in front of the restaurants where people sat drinking their aperitifs. The young Comtesse de Montemar appeared in Worth's creations. She was as crisp as a lettuce-leaf, as fresh as a rose.

Gabrielle's toilette too was renovated. Only Sophie's bore the hall-mark of Württemberg, but she was able to lay aside the cloth polonaise, and pull out of her wardrobe some gingham frocks which Johanna had made for

her two summers ago. One of these she had worn on a day she had spent with Richard on the Bodensee. They had sat in a row-boat together. She felt a romantic attachment for its short puffed sleeves, and the Madeira embroidery on its cuffs and collars. People were sitting in row-boats all along the margin of the lake in the Bois de Boulogne. In the shadowy places under the trees they were mirrored where the water was still and dark. The girls which the water reflected were not like Sophie in her gingham gown, they were gayer, more fashionably dressed; but in Richard's memory she knew her own image was no less dazzling and seductive than theirs.

CHAPTER FIVE

“La France, le plus beau royaume après celui
du ciel.”

HUGO GROTIUS, 1625

SOPHIE'S FRENCH was improving vastly. She undoubtedly possessed what the Germans call *Sprachtalent*. For what is language but talking; it is in the spoken rather than the written word that the soul of the language lives. No syllable of German ever voluntarily escaped her lips now; the bitter recollections of the war here in Paris restrained her. She was careful therefore as far as possible to correct all trace of her German accent, and after a year it would have been difficult to detect her nationality. But of course no foreigner in France can ever camouflage his alien origin to a Frenchman; those who heard her talk often mistook her for a Swiss or a Russian. She was fascinated by French idiom, and lost in admiration, as she sat in the Bois or the Champs Elysées, at how well

Parisian children spoke their own tongue. It was music to her, as it is to all people with a sensitive ear.

On several occasions she had been to the Opéra Comique with Gabrielle, and to the Comédie Française also. The last rendered her mute with ecstasy. With tranced breath she watched Sarah in *Phèdre*, and with trembling hands applauded her in *Hernani*. Tragedy swept her soul; like the irresistible roll of ocean it drowned her being; she became a grain of sand, a spray of seaweed carried helpless on the billows of verse. Gabrielle, seated beside her in the little suffocating *baignoire* behind the half-raised screen, all her critical faculties keenly awake, watched with indulgent amusement the transmutation of Sophie's soul, detached from place and circumstance.

"*Elle dit si bien*," Gabrielle would comment drily as the curtain dropped.

Elle, who? *Phèdre*, no, Sarah. Sarah with the feral golden eyes. "*Wunderbar*," Sophie murmured as the lights went up, and hundreds of opera-glasses scanned the house. The men and women in it looked like microbes, and their lorgnettes like the eyes and antennae of insects or lobsters. Only Sarah was human, only Sarah was divine.

At luncheon there was often discussion of the theatre, and controversies over books and plays were not infrequent when Monsieur Durand or the Duc de Clermont-Ferrand were present. She liked both these visitors who were much at home in the rue des Ecuries d'Artois,

so much at home that Sophie was often put out of countenance by their outspoken comments. "My dear Mathilde," she once heard Monsieur Durand say, "the hat you wore last Sunday at Longchamps is hideous, and the dress too for the matter of that. The brim descends on to your nose, and the collar of the gown disarranges your *Anglaise* (the long curl which had come into fashion). Don't wear either again; you are far too pretty to be *fagotée* like that. What was Worth thinking about? Be careful, or you will forfeit my affection. On the other hand you were *ravissante* at the ball at the British Embassy. I saw Lord Lyons follow you with admiring glances. That dress of *mousseline-de-soie* trimmed with *fleurs des champs*, and the garland of wheat and poppies on your head! Winterhalter must paint you in it—a dream."

And Countess Mathilde would bridle, accepting praise and censure with equal good-nature.

"*Mon bon Durand*," she would say, laughing, and hold out her hand for him to kiss. How strange, thought Sophie, this unceremonious intimacy between the sexes, this habit of addressing a man without his prefix, this utter sincerity which scorned the rubric of good manners, in the land of compliments and gallantry. But she grew accustomed to it, as she became inured to the ruthless allusions at table to the stomach, to constipation, and to child-birth.

But soon—too soon for Sophie—the Paris season ended. The schools closed, the *cours* were disbanded, and the exodus to country and seaside began. The Monte-

mars migrated to their small château in the Berri, and did not return till the leaves were off the acacias in the Champs Elysées. In the country the family relaxed completely. The little impoverished estate was far removed from neighbours; its owners lived there with a frugality and simplicity which surprised even the young German. The Countess said to her, "*J'aime la campagne, ça repose les cheveux*"; so with her golden mane screwed into a simple chignon, hatless, in the plainest of cotton dresses, she hovered in the garden, feeding the carp in the stone basin or the poultry in the yard, or drove her donkey-chaise along the dusty poplar-bordered roads. Grand'mère had gone to Vichy to do her annual cure, and Count Melchior had hung his emotional harp upon the willows by the waters of Aix.

The menus at Cabours were cut down to the rigorous necessities of life. Economy on dress, food, and service was the order of the day. Gabrielle and Sophie, under their Italian straw hats, sat on the terrace reading, often out loud, and Bertrand, mounted on a white horse with Eugène to squire him, ambled through the alleys of his father's woods, wearing a velvet jacket, close-fitting riding trousers, and a pretty tartan cravat tied in a bow.

But the French have little staying power for country life, and after a while Sophie saw marked signs of ennui in everybody. No visitors came, for hospitality would have been impossible. There was only *la mère Blaise* in the kitchen, wife of the gardener, and Gaspard who did service in the house and dining-room. Great stress was laid

on the health-giving qualities of country life and air; not a moment was to be wasted inside four walls. Walks in the forest, alfresco meals on the terrace, pacing of the formal garden on moonlit evenings, when the green-white lamps of glow-worms starred the paths, were insisted on. Paris seemed a million miles away, and so did Stuttgart.

With September came mosquitoes, unknown so far to Sophie, and she slept under a white asphyxiating tent. Her room was high in a pepper-pot tower. At the top of this turret was the dovecot, and she awoke each morning to the cooing of innumerable pigeons, interrupted by sudden flights of their uneasy wings.

Lime blossom from the pleached trees of the *charmille* was gathered each day and spread in the sun to dry for tisane. Camomile was tied head-downwards in bunches, rose-petals were collected on sheets of newspaper placed in the sunny window-seats to make fresh potpourri for the porcelain bowls in the rue des Ecuries d'Artois. As summer advanced the *plantes grasses* in the beds of the formal garden grew rank and abundant. Delicious golden chasselas filled baskets, dishes of ultra-coloured peaches and *pommes d'api* were handed round at table. "Eat lots of fruit," commanded the Countess; "it refreshes the blood."

Bertrand's blood certainly needed refreshing. He was pale and spotty. His boils and blains were a severe mortification to him, but his mother dealt lightly with these infirmities. "*Mon cher*, it's youth; *ça passera*." But every time he saw a mirror the poor boy threw it a

despairing glance. He was charming to everybody, to his sister, to Sophie, and she too treated him as a brother. Her uncontrollable blushes which had embarrassed her in Paris when he spoke to her, were a silly phase forgotten. Sometimes they spent an hour or two alone, whilst Gabrielle was out with her mother.

"I've only a few more months at home now, little Sophie, and then I have to live in stinking barracks, and march, and drill, and sweat, for two whole years. When I come back home after my military service where will you be, I wonder?" (Sophie wondered too; two years seemed an eternity.)

"It's strange, isn't it, that life is made up of such little cut-up pieces. The thread is continually broken; all these little fragments disconnected, severed, by whom, by what? Fate, Free Will, Predestination? One doesn't know. Will they ever be bound together, all these broken ends? Do you think that *anything* can be continuous *ici-bas*? Now your life and mine, they are two threads entwined for a while, twisted like these," and he drew a piece of filoselle silk from the skirt of her gown, which had caught there from her embroidery frame. "Unroll them, they are two; roll them again (it's easier to do), they make one. You would have thought that they would have been one for ever, strong in their union, defying those awful scissors over which we have no control. Some day will they all be knotted together, so that the skein may be wound from beginning to end?"

Another day as they were walking down a rutted path

in the forest looking for nuts, he spoke to her of his melancholy. "I am fancy-free—how terrible, I am heart-whole, how atrocious. If I could distribute part of mine to someone, or have it stolen from me! Some would say it's better so. I've got my *camarades* at the *Lyée*, affectionate parents, a kind sister, an adoring grandmother (he made a grimace), and a dear friend—that's you. Will you be always loyal and true to me, Sophie, through thick and thin? *Semper fidelis?*"

"Always, Bertrand; you know it."

"I'll remember that. On the 4th day of October in the year of Our Lord 1875, in the wood of Pré Joli, Commune of Lunerie, département du Cher, Fräulein Sophie Bühler swore to Bertrand de Montemar that she would be true to him, and to no other."

"I never said no other, Bertrand. I am true to all whom I love."

As she said the word "love" she coloured. It was Richard whom she loved. Was there no less word than "love" in this limited French tongue? How could one say "like"? She liked Bertrand very well, but she did not love him; at least she thought not. Anyway, it would be treachery to love any young man but Richard. He had said to her "*Bleib mir treu*" in the Leopold Saal. Be true to me—and now Bertrand was pleading the same. Loyal and true. Anyway, what is Truth? Someone had asked that question in the Gospels. You could be true to a loved one and disloyal to yourself. Perhaps all that really mattered was to *aimer*; that was why in France there is

only one expression. She remembered what she had read in a book: "To love anything sincerely is an act of grace, but to love the best sincerely is a state of grace."

There were no nuts in the wood; the village children must have rifled them. All the way home she searched the bushes in vain, her wide mauve skirts catching in the branches, her hands plunged deep between the rough corrugated leaves. Arched brambles on the side of the thicket were weighed down under blackberries. She began to fill her empty basket.

"Don't do that, Sophie. They are inedible; only gypsies eat them." She looked at him with wondering eyes. Blackberries were poison? Her lips were already stained with their purple juice, her hands scratched by their sanguine thorns. (He kissed the wounds to make them better.) A strange country this, where blackberries are forbidden fruit and you can only love, not like.

The date for leaving Cabours had arrived. Sophie felt no regrets. She wanted to get back to Paris and sister Anna whose summer had been spent at Deauville. The autumn evenings were rather depressing in the country, the fall of the leaf was damp. The château was growing mouldy; log-fires could not keep the humidity from invading the house; there was no other form of heating.

The trees were turning: leaves from the chestnut trees, the first to fall, touched with rich gold and amber, flew before the wind. She thought of them as sparks from a fire which, flying from tree to tree, would soon kindle the whole forest. The conflagration of autumn would

spread fast. Leaping tongues of flame were already licking certain limbs of beech and elm. The poplars were still untouched; they looked to be covered with pale gold paillettes—paillettes were in fashion on evening gowns.

She had begun to think of the rue des Ecuries d'Artois as home. Cabours was only a halting-place, and the thought of being back in her grey bedroom, with its window which looked down on to that pocket-handkerchief of a garden, filled her with joy. Of course Grand'mère and Minet were there too, but she had evolved a work-a-day philosophy, and looked upon them as part of life's unalterable evil. Like Bertrand's spots and everything else, *ça passera*.

The Comte had only come to the château on flying visits; he had spent his days there closeted with his agent, attempting no doubt, with his help, to screw a few more thousand francs from the rack-rented estates. In Paris he welcomed his family with syrupy smiles and words. He twitted Sophie on her sunburn and freckles, pinched Gabrielle's rosy cheeks, and congratulated his wife on her *mine reposée*. Grand'mère, depleted by the fatigues of her cure, seldom left her rooms. Minet was courting, and spent his days and nights at large on the roofs which Sophie could view from her bedroom window. The routine of lessons for the young people started again. Monsieur Raymond dropped in on Friday afternoons for Gabrielle's music-lesson, and Bertrand's *répétiteur* called daily. The Abbé flitted in and out spasmodically. He helped Bertrand for love of the family, for

he had been tutor to Comte Melchior in his youth, and was sincerely attached to both father and son.

Quiet months rolled by. Sophie had become an institution. Of course she saw very little of Bertrand during this intensive programme of work, which was destined to culminate in the laurels of his *baccalauréat*. Anxiety as to whether he would pass his "*bachot*" was in the air, nothing must deflect him from his studies, in order that he might obtain his degree.

Sophie, seated by the window, was mending her white lisle stockings one afternoon, when she heard his rap at the door. He came in and sat down on the foot of her Empire bed.

"Sophie, I have come to tell you something. It's a secret. I can trust you. You have not forgotten what you promised in the nut wood. You will be true to me always. I rely on you. Here is the thing (*voici la chose*). I have a *camarade* who is very ill, dangerously ill, and he is always asking for me, but his family—and the doctor I suppose—refuse to let me see him. He is fretting for me, wearing himself out by his pleadings. I know him. Now if his wish were granted, it would save his life, for it is truly a matter of life and death. But I can only get into his apartment at night—late at night, when his people are in bed and asleep. He will arrange for his nurse to let me in. But now we come to the difficulty. How am I to get out of this house at that hour and, more difficult still, get back into it? Only with your help, *chère amie*, only with your knowledge and consent."

Sophie, with a white stocking-foot pulled over one hand, held her needle idle in the other. She saw by Bertrand's manner how agitated he was, and the picture he presented of his dying friend moved her deeply. Bertrand had so much heart! One could not say no to Bertrand, but how was she to engineer this feat? Nevertheless she assured him of her willingness.

"You have only to bolt the door after I leave—at midnight—or perhaps later. I have arranged with Marcel, the hedgehog (they shared this joke), to let me through the outer lodge, and let me in, at, well, I really don't know at what hour I shall return, maybe at four in the morning, possibly later. I will get to the back of the house and from the garden throw something against your window. Then, dear Sophie, you who will be listening for my signal, will come down the stairs on tiptoe and let me in, ever so softly. Feel your way in the dark, a light might wake my parents; and in this manner you will be the instrument for saving André's life."

It sounded simple enough; what puzzled Sophie was this all-night séance with the sick friend. Her German rationalism asserted itself.

"But won't it be very bad for André to have the excitement of your visit when he should be resting? You surely should not stay with him more than a few minutes, an hour at most. A good nurse would not allow him to talk so long."

"Ah, Sophie, you are not aware of how much we have to say. He is tormented by an unfortunate love-affair.

He wants me to intervene. All day long he calls her name—and mine. It's piteous."

Bertrand looked a little piteous too, his lanky hair ruffled, his face tense. His languid dark eyes, with a little red pimple between the brows, were holding hers.

"All right, I will do as you say. Let me know how you want me to let you out."

Every detail was carefully planned. At midnight he would whisper her name through the keyhole; a knock at the door would be more dangerous, and the entry would be no more difficult than the exit. Sophie would watch for both.

The Count and the Countess went to bed early that evening. A round of parties and opera had fatigued them; they retired as the little Louis XVI clock, part of the pretty *décor de cheminée* in the library, chimed ten. Bertrand had allowed a long interval to elapse before his sibilant "H—ss" sounded in front of Sophie's door. She followed him noiselessly down the dark staircase; he lit a match in the hall to see the latch of the front door; the flame spluttered in a cloud of mephitic sulphur fumes. This gave enough grudging light for her to open and re-lock it. Bertrand passed out into the round blue night. She could see no stars above him. She heard the click of the *porte cochère* as the amiable hedgehog pulled the string in the concierge's lodge.

Sophie spent the next two hours bolt-upright on her chair. From two to four she rested fully clothed on her bed. At four she grew anxious and stood by the window.

At five she felt the chill of early dawn, and wrapped her plaid dolman round her shoulders. At five-thirty, despite the cold, she opened wide her window and leant out, she knew not for how long, with her elbows resting on the sill. Minet was wandering in the garden below; she saw his silhouette against a moonlit patch of sky. His back raised to a perfect arch, he was uttering loud raucous cries. What was Minet doing? And where, Oh God, was Bertrand? He was late; if he delayed much longer the servants would be astir and the game was up. She pictured Bertrand's friend tossing on his fever-bed, with Bertrand soothing him. She thought of Bertrand's anguish if André died. Would this meeting save the invalid? She remembered the beautiful relationships of other young lives—David and Jonathan; Héloïse and Abélard. No, that was different. Héloïse was a girl—that was love, and this was friendship.

A moment later and she saw him. He was standing beside Minet, with his face upturned to her window. She shuffled down the staircase, trembling like a leaf. Minet appeared between Bertrand's legs as the door opened, brushed past her, his tail stiff and erect, and frisked sideways down the passage. She did not dare speak. In the wan light of morning Bertrand's face looked pale. He seemed to ignore her utterly. She felt a pang of resentment that he whispered no word of thanks. But perhaps it was more prudent. They ascended the staircase in death-like silence. Perhaps André *was* dead, that was why Bertrand looked so strange.

CHAPTER SIX

“Hier stehe ich! ich kann nicht anders. Gott
helfe mir!”

LUTHER

IT WAS ALBERT who had betrayed him. Albert was the Judas. The hedgehog in the concierge's lodge would never have done such a thing—he was faithful and true; *Semper fidelis* was the motto of this fretful porcupine, as it was of Sophie.

Albert, the informer, had gone to Bertrand's room to rouse him at an early hour, as the young student wished to revise some Latin prose before he went to the *Lycée*. He had found the bedroom empty and the bed unslept in. As a murderer often overlooks a link in the evidence which may ultimately bring him to the gallows, so Bertrand had forgotten to cancel his order to be called at six. Albert, having made an especial effort to be up and dressed at streak of dawn, resented the fact that he had

drawn a blank, and whilst the Countess was sipping her morning coffee, two hours later, had burst into her room with the untoward tidings. The Countess had sent for the Count, and the perturbed parents gazed at each other in a wild surmise. No chance to get young Bertrand on the mat that morning, he had already departed for the seat of learning. Melchior and Mathilde in their *négligés* took counsel together. The Count was as ever a defeatist, but his urbanity did not forsake him.

“*Chère amie*, it is what one must expect at his age—*que voulez-vous?* Let us hope the lady is pretty, and *bien portante*.”

“Melchior, you are inhuman.”

“On the contrary, my dear, I err on the other side perhaps.”

“But he is a child—an infant—Heaven knows what scrape he may have got into. Remember, he has been up all night, and his final exams not three weeks hence!”

“Had he got any pocket-money?” asked the careful father.

“His usual weekly allowance of course, but there was the fifty francs he received for his anniversary on the fifteenth. We gave him that a week ago. Perhaps he took it with him.”

“One can’t do much on fifty francs,” the Count mused sadly. “I wonder if he brought back any change?”

It was no use wondering; one could wonder oneself crazy and get no further.

Mathilde changed the venue. “How did he get out of

the house and in again? How did he pass through the lodge? What was Marcel doing unlocking the *porte cochère* at such an hour? Perhaps the boy has got a master-key. If so he will certainly lose it and we shall all have our throats cut; Paris is full of assassins. *Mon Dieu!*" She wrung her hands.

"Albert may know," suggested the Count, yawning. A man always on the knife-edge of ennui, he was moving off to his own room, swinging the tassel of his Paisley dressing-gown. He felt a longing to close the incident.

"Yes, Albert may know," the Countess echoed.

Actually Albert knew nothing beyond the bare facts which he had already revealed.

"You saw Monsieur Bertrand before he went to the *Lycée*. How did he look?" Mathilde cross-questioned.

"*Monsieur votre fils* took his *petit déjeuner* at 7.30. . . . He was a little pale perhaps. I have already told Madame la Comtesse that I did not see him enter the house. I heard Mademoiselle Gabrielle practising her scales after I had carried the tray to *ce jeune Monsieur's* room. The young German lady (Albert could never bring himself to call Sophie by her name) rose early also."

The young German lady! She might possibly contribute a clue. Comtesse Mathilde glanced at her watch. Ten o'clock; she had a fitting at eleven. To reach the rue de la Paix by that time she must dress at once and at full speed; besides, there was no use in following the trail without Sophie.

The sun was radiant, the sky forget-me-not blue; the

crisp frosty day revived her as, in her cloth-topped boots, she walked briskly down the Faubourg St. Honoré, sniffing the air laden with the smell of wood-smoke and new paint, and the violets which flower-sellers were offering at street corners in their kiosks.

Sophie was not feeling so fresh. She was shivery and sad as she crouched over the fire in the library, where Gabrielle was reading Schiller out loud to her.

"Are you ill?" the girl asked after a while, lifting her eyes from the *Jungfrau von Orleans* and observing her lassitude.

"Not ill, just tired," Sophie answered, and when Gabrielle proposed an airing she admitted she had a headache. So Gabi went with Emilienne, her mother's maid, instead. Emilienne was the wife of Albert. Sophie always thought that Emilienne looked like the flat-iron which she never had out of her hand. Her lair was the *lingerie*, a dark cubicle on the first floor, lined with cupboards. The Countess's evening dresses at times hung here, suspended from the ceiling—they looked like monstrous tropical flowers in the pale rays which filtered through a skylight. Enormous petals of light-coloured tulle, titanic convolvuluses, gigantic peonies, overblown roses. Below these skirts, Emilienne stood at a table pressing, pressing always, or tying up bundles of table napkins, of sheets, of towels with coloured ribbons, and ranging them on their shelves, so that, punctual and organised as the rotation of crops, the napery should be used in appointed order. Emilienne, flat-bosomed, black-

gowned, jet-trimmed, with inky hair, oiled and luminous, presided here. The only hours at which she emerged were those during which the Countess dressed or undressed.

Sophie had heard the Countess say, "For a woman to be well groomed she must never depart from the usual sequence in which she dresses. If she has the habit of putting on her chemise after she has pulled on her stockings, or her petticoat before she sits down to her mirror, well and good, but she must adhere to that practice. Any variation from it is fatal; she will look untidy and dishevelled all day." So the ritual was faithfully observed.

Emilienne was not pleased at being forced out of her camera obscura into the dazzling sunshine of the Champs Elysées with Gabrielle. Sour as a quince, she kept pace with the girl in unbroken silence.

"What's the matter with everyone to-day?" Gabrielle enquired as they passed the Guignol where Punch and Judy were playing their age-old tragedy to a knot of furlissed children. "I want to stop at the florist at the corner of the Rond-Point, to buy some jonquils for Fräulein Sophie. She's got a headache."

"And no wonder, with all these goings-on."

"What goings-on? What has Fräulein Sophie done?"

"I prefer not to say; I will leave that to her, and to Monsieur Bertrand."

"But, Emilienne, *c'est une si brave fille*; I'm sure she's done no wrong."

"*Fille* in more senses than one, Mademoiselle Gabrielle! Who else would have helped your brother in this escapade?"

In vain Gabrielle attempted to glean more information. The tight lips behind the floating veil remained compressed, and though the girl was conscious of the storm-clouds, she heard no more of their menacing thunder.

Grand'mère at *déjeuner* was unusually spry; she even threw a sub-acid smile at Sophie, who left her food almost untasted, concealed under her knife and fork. Sophie was yearning for the moment when she would be alone with Bertrand. She wanted to hear if he had succeeded during that long vigil in calming André's fevered fancies. Had he soothed, smoothed, and cooled the crumpled pillow? She also wanted recognition of her services—a word, a gesture. She knew Bertrand was not ungrateful. What she had done for him was no great thing, a night of watching—and Bertrand had watched too, beside the sick-bed of his friend. But there was more in it than that; Bertrand had broken bounds, and he had fatigued himself unduly (she remembered how white and haggard he looked as she let him in) when his strength should be carefully husbanded for the supreme effort of the *baccalauréat*. But a life was at stake, and she hoped to hear in a few hours that the forlorn hope had been justified. The afternoon dragged on interminably. Would he never return?

During *goûter* in Gabrielle's bedroom she heard voices

in the hall, and footsteps, Bertrand's and the Count's, and Albert announcing the Abbé. She did not dare go downstairs. Doors opened and shut; she listened with strained ears. If only she could intercept Bertrand on the way to his room; if only she could hear from his lips that all was well. She was alone. Gabrielle had gone out to tea with a friend. The room was dark, but she did not bother to light the reading-lamp. She must have dozed a little in her chair, for she felt suddenly intensely cold and stiff, and started painfully when she heard a knock at the door.

The Countess entered; even in that moment of supreme agitation she noticed how pretty she looked, with her sable toque low over her brows, and a bunch of green orchids at her throat. A delicious perfume of *chypre* escaped from her furs.

"Fräulein Bühler, we ask you to come to my mother-in-law's apartment. My husband is there, and Monsieur l'Abbé; we are anxious for your explanation of this strange story."

Hasenfuss (hare-foot), that was what her sister Julie had called her—and Sophie felt timid as a hare. With shaking knees she followed her employer. Like a hare's fear-racked eyes, her own big hazel ones shone mutely pleading; if she had had ears to lay back, they would have flattened themselves along the arch of her bowed head. Her heart was beating so fast that she felt its pulsings in her throat where the little drops of her jet pendant quivered. It seemed an endless journey, down

the stairs, along the passage, and through the glass swing-door, but even as she trod this *via dolorosa* the thought that she might see Bertrand in his grandmother's room supported her. Something terrible had happened, something *fürchterlich*. André had died, that was it. The long séance with his friend at night had been too much for him, had defeated its end. *Ach!* boys! How foolish they were, how obstinate, how unreasonable! She knew he had stayed with André too long, but what could she do?

The door of the old Countess's boudoir was flung open by Comtesse Mathilde. Her husband was inside, and two others. The old lady and the Abbé Lavallier, no one else.

"*Asseyez-vous!*" someone commanded in that Faubourg French which Sophie had grown accustomed to (others said "*asseyez-vous!*").

After the darkness of her own room, the hall, the lobby, and the salon seemed blindingly light. The log fires burnt fiercely; the close-curtained windows did not allow a breath of air to penetrate. The Comte was standing warming his thin legs; the Abbé was seated opposite the old lady. He indicated a chair to Sophie.

The Abbé was invited to speak. He was addressing himself to her with a grace of manner and diction which bewildered her. His eloquent hands spoke too, underlined certain words, made the interrogation mark after others, weighted a sentence or lightened a phrase. It was a very fine speech, and the play of expression on his features was as lambent, as scorching as those flames which licked the burning logs on the hearth.

Sophie had, according to the Abbé, betrayed a trust, for the Count and Countess had put their faith in her. She had been untrue to them (oh, that puzzling thing Truth, she knew it was a will-o'-the-wisp). Sophie had assisted Bertrand to get out of the house at midnight, and had, as treacherously, facilitated his return. But for her this enormity could never have been perpetrated. She had assisted in a conspiracy which had broken the hearts of the boy's parents. It was useless to refute, ignoble to deny. Fräulein Bühler was not to ask him how the facts were known; that would merely implicate various people and make more mischief. The thing was self-evident. What had she to say?

Sophie had a great deal to say, but in spite of her *Sprachtalent*—her linguistic faculty—she did not unfortunately say it as well as would have done the Abbé. Only Fénelon could have emulated him, and Fénelon at this juncture might have felt pity for these heart-broken parents, for the *Cygne de Cambrai* himself had once lamented, "*Il est bien difficile de faire l'éducation des princes.*" What Sophie stammered forth was lame and confused. She said she had felt so sad for Bertrand's friend (here there was a flutter of surprise and consternation): that illness (deeper consternation) . . . that impossibility of effecting a meeting. . . . Bertrand had assured her it was a matter of life and death. . . . Surely she could not have refused to help him. . . . His friend . . . his dearest friend. He had said he would stay a short while only.

Grand'mère struck up. "Perhaps Mademoiselle can

give us some more details. She can furnish us with the address of the lady Bertrand visited last night."

"Lady!" Sophie gasped. "It was a school friend. A *camarade* at the *Lycée*, a young man who was grieving over an unhappy love-affair. Monsieur Bertrand went to his house to console him. Send for Bertrand," she added desperately, "he will tell you all."

The Abbé smiled—a strange mirthless smile. "You are too simple, Fräulein Bühler; you do not believe that any more than you expect us to believe it."

"But it's true, I swear it's true."

"Is there any object in prolonging this interview?" asked the Abbé. "I do not think we need detain you further."

Sophie rose. She stood for a moment, inside the circle of her interrogators.

"Pardon me, but may I just ask one thing? I have not seen your son all day: is his friend better? Has his life been saved?"

The Comte and Comtesse were converted. They believed in Sophie's innocence, in Bertrand's duplicity.

"She is too *gobeuse*—too much of a goose," grumbled Comte Melchior, and his wife added, "The important thing is to get her out of the house before worse happens."

The Abbé smiled again. "That, my dear friends, is not difficult; her ticket to Germany is all the talisman required."

When Sophie got back to her room she found a little

pencil note on her dressing-table from Bertrand. It began, "*Merci, merci.*" That was balm to Sophie's soul, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness. The last sentence was almost illegible. "Little Sophie, some day you will realise that *pour connaître l'amour il faut sortir de soi.*" But through scalding tears, too moved to have recourse to her pince-nez, Sophie read, "*il faut sortir le soir.*" That was certainly what Bertrand had done—and Minet too.

CHAPTER SEVEN

*"Though I am young and cannot tell
Either what Love or Death is well,
Yet I have heard they both bear darts
And both do aim at human hearts."*

BEN JONSON

THE TICKET TO STUTTGART was never bought. Capable, cosmopolitan, worldly-wise sister Anna, in the rich Jewish apartment in the Boulevard de Courcelles, decided otherwise. Sophie must pursue the study of the French language for another year or more, and then, who knows, obtain a situation in England where another sister, Louise, was installed in an aristocratic family.

Anna had not been severe with Sophie. She was sophisticated enough to derive a certain amount of amusement from the story. She even related it to the banker, her employer, to entertain him. But she realised what the Comtesse de Montemar had said was true. Sophie was too *gobeuse*, too much of a simpleton, to remain in Paris; any other city would be preferable, and

Anna was not long before she found the right-shaped hole for this little inconveniently formed peg.

Brussels was the place, French-speaking Belgium. The accent she would acquire there might not be quite so pure, but here again the fates were kind. The situation which offered was in an English family, and Sophie would have the immense advantage of studying two languages simultaneously. Monsieur Segelmann suggested that Anna should go there to interview Mrs. Hamilton before the matter was finally clinched, and the Countess agreed. She came back enchanted with the Scottish widow and her brood—four girls who were being educated abroad. A few days before Christmas Anna was to deposit Sophie in their midst; it remained only for Sophie to pack her trunk and make her farewells to Paris, and those who belonged to her life here.

Sophie steeled her heart against grief. She had no very acute regrets in leaving the rue des Ecuries d'Artois. She would miss gay, equable Gabrielle, the metallic glitter of the Countess and her circle, the graceful languor of the Count, but to remove herself from the claws of Grand'-mère and Minet was a matter for congratulation. Most of all she minded abandoning Bertrand. A maternal tenderness had crept into her heart for him. She had been the unwitting cause of the emptying of vials of wrath on his defenceless head. Bertrand was in for a bad time, she knew it. His "*bachot*" was looming ahead, only a few days now until that fiery ordeal, and both his melancholy

and his boils had increased alarmingly during the last two weeks.

Whether by intention or by accident, few words had passed between them of late. The boy had been shadowed by the Abbé. His home-work was done in the priest's house, and Father Lavallier brought him home each evening after dinner, so there had been little opportunity of meeting. The day before her journey to Brussels she had waylaid Bertrand on the stairs, and as the house was empty, she detained him for a few moments in the hall. He had his skates in his hand; a friend of his mother's was sending for him to take him to the rink in the Bois de Boulogne.

"I'll say goodbye to you now, Bertrand; when I leave to-morrow morning you'll be at the *Lycée*."

"I wish you a very good journey, Mademoiselle."

"I wish *you* success in all your examinations. I shall think of you next week."

"Don't think of me ever. I am a *raté*, a failure: one of those unfortunate human beings who will never be understood. I am destined to bring disaster on all those who approach me. I must stand alone—always. What did your Goethe say about bread and tears? That is my régime anyway!"

"Of course it's not. Lots of good things are in store for you. Think of *me*—I am going away to live with strangers. You have your home, you are loved by all those in it. At least you haven't got to *earn* your bread like me. How would you like to be starting off to-morrow into

the Unknown? This English lady may be terrible, her daughters may be detestable."

"It's my fault that you are going. I ought never to have asked you to help me," Bertrand muttered gloomily.

"It's no use living backwards. As I told you at Cabours, I will always be your friend, and if I can ever be of any service to you, you can rely on me, but I'm afraid I'm not a very useful person—just a mouse that might nibble the mesh of a net; like in the fable."

Bertrand had become a stranger. Where was the Bertrand of Cabours, who had seemed so close to her in the nut wood, who had talked of the broken threads of life? Here was one of them already. The skein which was winding so prettily had got all tangled, and to straighten it out a break was necessary. He did not seem to mind, so she was not going to, not she. Only she wished that he would call her "little Sophie" once more. She made one desperate throw.

"I have not had an opportunity of asking you about your sick friend. I hope you have good news of him."

Bertrand became vaguely uneasy; he moved nearer to the door and began playing with its handle. He scanned the courtyard with eager eyes, as a man whose vision scours the horizon for a sail.

"I can't think why Madame de Brie's carriage does not drive in; she said she would send her coupé for me at two," he remarked irrelevantly, and he jangled his skates noisily, his glance still averted from Sophie.

"You see, Bertrand, if I felt that I had helped you and him in the least degree, I should be so happy. I know your parents are vexed with me, but I promised you when we were in the country that I would be *semper fidelis*, and I kept my word."

The crack of a whip resounded under the archway, and the de Bries' brougham rattled across the paving-stones. The concierge came out of his lodge to observe. Bertrand clasped Sophie's hand for the fraction of a second. "*Au revoir, à bientôt*. I must not keep the coachman waiting."

An icy blast blew into the lobby as she stood at the front door. He had not replied to her question, after all, but jumped into the carriage at lightning speed. It turned clumsily, and drove away, leaving her waving on the threshold. Marcel and she exchanged sympathetic glances across the frost-rimed yard. The concierge had been true to Bertrand also; they had done their best for him. In life one is seldom rewarded for services rendered.

Sophie's goodbyes to other members of the family were as emotionally sterile. The old Countess presented her with a book. Gabrielle gave her a bottle of perfume, and her mother a string of cut-jet beads from a shop in the rue Royale. The Count sent a box of chocolates to her room by Albert, to stave off pangs of hunger on the voyage. But when sister Anna came at ten the following day to fetch her in a station *fiacre*, she had an unpleasant feeling that she was being expelled in spite of these evidences of friendliness. Why did they say "*A bientôt*"? she wondered. She knew that the parting was final, and

so did they. The strand was snapped for all time. Well, she must mend the loose ends. There was a big skein yet to wind, it would all smooth out again and ravel together.

"Goodbye, Gabrielle, I'll write to you often, *chérie*. Adieu." They were all waiting at the door. Adieu Emilienne, adieu Albert, adieu Chef, adieu everybody. *Adieu charmant pays de France.*

Anna's bright face was framed inside the window of the cab. How nice to be travelling with Anna; they would talk of the Ludwigstrasse. It was just a year since the Green Sunday Ball in the Leopold Saal. The pink tarlatan dress had remained packed in her trunk ever since. It was as if it lay in a coffin. Perhaps it was a coffin, and Sophie's youth lay buried in it. She would be twenty-three in January.

Mrs. Hamilton was staying at a *pension de famille* in Brussels. She and her family filled it entirely, so a room in a hotel near by had been engaged for the two sisters. They arrived at seven o'clock, cold and exhausted, to find a kind note from her written in German, to welcome them. It was heartening. They were invited to come round the next day at eleven o'clock to the Pension Villemorin.

The long uninterrupted hours with her sister had stirred up dormant nostalgia in Sophie's soul. Their talk had brought back the familiar scene of the *Wohnzimmer*,

the horsehair-covered sofa behind the round table, the cuckoo clock between the windows, the portrait of Pastor Wiesemann, their maternal grandfather—dead long since—which hung above the bookcase, with its handsome carved oak frame and glazed doors. Books were much treasured by Frau Finanzrath. Immensely costly to buy, they were protected by brown-paper home-made dust-jackets, and very occasionally loaned thus to friends, but more often kept behind these glass windows to be read and re-read with unchanging fidelity. *Jane Eyre* (in German of course) was her first favourite.

Anna's conversation brought it all back with painful vividness. How good to hear German spoken again; the rich tender language, overlaid with simile, profound yet simple. She was starving for it without realising her hunger. In spite of their fatigue, they talked long after they got into bed, their dark heads lying close together on the pillow, below a huge canopy, with a mountainous *duvet* over them to keep their young limbs warm. The weather was bitterly cold.

The Pension Villemorin wore rather a forbidding aspect on that December morning when the two Swabian sisters stood on its doorstep. An east wind was blowing, and whistled through the bare branches of the two chestnut trees which flanked it. A seedy-looking waiter opened the door and showed them into a salon on the first floor. It was unoccupied. Sophie's eyes wandered round the rep-covered furniture and ponderous Louis Philippe tables. A few silver-framed photographs stood on these. They

had not long to wait. Mrs. Hamilton entered through double doors which connected with a bedroom. Her smile was grave and intimidating. Anna took the cue instantly. Her Parisian chic evaporated, the Teutonic flavour reasserted itself.

"And this is Sophie," said Mrs. Hamilton blandly, after shaking hands with the elder sister. "I must introduce her to my daughters."

They entered a few minutes later, four of them. Sophie felt overpowered. Such tall lanky girls, so many of them too. Pale lips and complexions, ash-blond braids, or floating tresses, controlled by combs, long feet, and blanched hands. Everybody was dressed in unrelieved black. Mrs. Hamilton wore a bonnet with flowing widow's veil. The children's expressions were docile and intelligent; their silence was not discouraging, but it surprised Sophie after the animation of Gabrielle. They grouped themselves around the piano.

"Is she musical?—we work so hard at music. Jean has her violin and Connie her 'cello. Alison is a good pianist, I am glad to say, and Maud sings. It's for their music—and languages of course—that we came abroad. The girls are taking lessons at the Conservatoire, and I am looking forward to your sister helping them with their practice." She continued to address Anna.

Vain hope—Sophie's pianoforte répertoire consisted of a bright little polka which she knew by heart, and two or three pieces which she could play out of an album. "She has not specialised in music," Anna faltered. (Oh,

but she had! How many thousand times had she not limped through the "*Invitation à la valse*," and a sonata by Clementi?) All this time Anna marvelled at the cold excellence of Mrs. Hamilton's features—high narrow brow, white as alabaster; aquiline nose, with delicately pinched nostrils. The mouth was just a trifle drawn and thin, as if it had lost its elasticity for smiles, but the teeth were white and even when her lips parted. White ribbon bonnet-strings framed the firm chin.

Anna hoped that the next question would afford her the opportunity for a more enthusiastic reply.

"Of course you are Protestant?"

"Yes, oh yes."

"And fond of walking?"

Anna was able to assure her heartily on this point also.

"You enjoyed your time in Paris?" This time she was speaking to Sophie. "Well, then, you will like Brussels; it is often described as a little Paris. I don't like Paris myself. I find the French so very insincere, and the theatres are unsuitable for girls. I have always felt a great affection for Germany."

"The *gnädige Frau* speaks German fabulously well," Anna interpolated.

Mrs. Hamilton gave her a wintry smile. "I think we English love Germany because of our dear Queen. She always spoke German with her husband, the Prince Consort. Queen Victoria never felt the same sympathy for France, though of course she has been very kind to the ex-Empress, who now lives in England. And then

her Majesty's eldest daughter is *your* Empress. Our royal family hold such a big place in our hearts. The Queen's son is to be married next month to the Czar's daughter. What a wonderful wedding it will be at St. Petersburg! You have an enlightened King in Württemberg. Do your parents go to Court?"

Anna had reluctantly to admit that her father and mother were not *hof-fähig* though her father occupied an important post in the Treasury.

The English girls, though absolutely silent, were throwing out kindly rays of understanding in Sophie's direction; subconsciously she felt their warming influence. Their mother suggested that they should show her the room she had succeeded in obtaining for Sophie in the *pension*.

"I'm afraid it's rather an attic, a servant's room really, but I have asked Madame Villemorin to refurnish it, and it's quite habitable now, with a good stove and comfortable bed." The imposing flotilla of daughters sailed out of the salon with Sophie, frail little craft, in their wake.

Mrs. Hamilton began to talk about herself.

"A year ago I had the sorrow of losing my husband. He died of consumption after a long illness borne with Christian fortitude. I decided to sell my house in Scotland and wander about the Continent educating my daughters. I have a grown-up son who lives in Majorca, and another who is in his last year at the Edinburgh University. After we leave Brussels, I expect to go for a

while to Switzerland, and then perhaps to Germany; at the end of that time all the girls will be out" (she used the English word, and Anna wondered what it meant), "and I hope to buy a house in London."

It sounded a pilgrimage full of variety and attraction, and Anna almost envied it.

The hands of the clock were on the stroke of twelve. "I am expecting you both to have *déjeuner* with us. When does your train leave for Paris?" Anna was catching the three-thirty. She accepted the invitation.

CHAPTER EIGHT

*"Close thine eyes and rest secure,
Thy soul is safe, thy body sure,
He that guards, He that keeps
Never slumbers, never sleeps.
A quiet conscience in the breast
Has only peace, has only rest."*

CHARLES I

THEY REALLY WERE NICE, these English girls. After the first few days Sophie felt as if she had been with them all her life. In particular she liked Alison, who was nearest her own age. Alison was "out," but she had no taste for balls or parties; her father's illness and death had shadowed her adolescence. She was her mother's right hand, a younger edition of Mrs. Hamilton, and though her features were not as exquisitely chiselled, she had the same sweetness of expression and the same calm dark-blue eyes. Alison wore her hair parted down the centre and banded smoothly. Sophie thought she looked like the pictures of the Flemish Madonnas in the Musée.

Jean was more turbulent, Maud a swaying lily, and

Constance a homely-faced, simple soul with an undoubted talent for her 'cello. A lot of chamber music was discoursed in the evenings, with Alison at the cottage piano, a competent musician. When the concert was over, Mrs. Hamilton read prayers. Sophie did not understand a syllable, and she watched furtively the thin kneeling forms, and heard the reader's last petition, "Lighten our darkness, we beseech Thee, O Lord," till it eventually became familiar. There was little darkness in this translucent home, none of those unlit corners which she had sensed in the rue des Ecuries d'Artois. All was bright, light, and clear here, but if there was no penumbra there was also no dazzling illumination. It was like living with the blinds half down, or like a day on which there is veiled sunshine but no cloud.

Mrs. Hamilton was determined that Sophie should learn English. She undertook the task herself, and whilst her daughters were studying she devoted herself to it. The *Sprachtalent* asserted itself again, and in a very few months Sophie could chatter tolerably well, and read fluently. *Jane Eyre*, which she knew so intimately in German, was the reading book. Mrs. Hamilton selected the chapters which did not stress indelicately Rochester's passionate love for Jane. The pupil progressed amazingly, too well perhaps, for now she spoke English constantly with the girls. There were, however, certain expressions used freely in conversation which puzzled her. "Lady-like" was one of these.

"What does it *really* mean, Alison?" she enquired, and

Alison would try to find the equivalent in French or German.

"*Distinguée, vornehm.*"

"But your mother spoke of the dressmaker as being a ladylike person. Besides a man can be *distingué* or *vornehm*. It must be a quality which only women possess. Why must everybody be ladylike? Is it so very important?"

Alison admitted that it was of vital importance. Unless you were ladylike you got nowhere, you had better be dead. Englishwomen were nearly all ladies. But Sophie remained bewildered.

Sometimes in commenting on people Mrs. Hamilton would say, "Of course he (or she) is quite nice, but he (or she) is not 'one of us.'"

"Alison, explain that to me, please. Not one of you?" Sophie questioned. "Does it mean not one of your relations?"

"Oh no, Sophie, of course not; it only means that they are different."

"But everybody can't be the same, and the man your mother was speaking about often comes to luncheon here. He belongs to society. Why is he not one of you?"

"I suppose Mother thinks he is not quite a gentleman."

"Gentleman" and "ladylike," incomprehensible terms, belonging exclusively to English idiom, or perhaps the sole property and prerogative of this family. For Sophie the word henceforth was tinted with the Hamilton

colour, a subdued tone something between mauve and grey.

The spectre of tuberculosis haunted the mother's thoughts. Her daughters might carry the germ in their flat chests and under their narrow shoulder-blades. Health was watched vigilantly. Maud was given a glass of port wine each morning, she was desperately anaemic; and Alison was encouraged to eat beefsteak. When an epidemic of measles swept through Brussels in the early spring, Jean and Connie went down with it. Sophie was immune; she had had it recently, so she became sick-nurse to them, supervised by Mrs. Hamilton, who at first thought she could deal with the illness without calling in a doctor. But Jean became alarmingly bad one night, and Mrs. Hamilton asked Madame Villemorin for the address of the cleverest doctor.

An eminent Bruxellois practitioner called an hour later and was ushered into the sick-room. Mrs. Hamilton flinched as he bowed over her hand, and armed with stethoscope, advanced towards Jean's bed. He was so young and challenging, so rosy-cheeked and blue-eyed! He began to unbutton the front of Jean's nainsook nightgown with proprietary hands, "A little lower, please," as the bright-eyed girl, flushed with fever, perfunctorily assisted him. Mrs. Hamilton took up a position on the opposite side of the bed.

"There is slight congestion of the left lung. We must get the temperature down. She must be sponged all over

with tepid water every two hours throughout the night. I will call early to-morrow morning. Plenty of Contréville water and a powder which I shall prescribe." His diagnosis, though rapid, inspired confidence.

The sponging-down was to be carried out as soon as the doctor had gone. Mrs. Hamilton, accustomed to blanket-bathing and high temperatures, got to work in a business-like manner. Jean, too ill to raise her head, nevertheless protested vehemently.

"Oh no, Mamma, not *all over*. Just my hands and face—I couldn't, no, I couldn't, have you wash my chest—and my legs." But her mother was adamant.

"Nonsense, child."

She was stripped unwillingly under the bed-covers, and the treatment was carried out, Jean lying with her arms crossed over her young bosom, a St. Agnes awaiting immolation.

Mrs. Hamilton could not nurse her every night. She had already spent two sleepless ones beside the invalids. Sophie volunteered to take duty during the early part of this one.

At eleven o'clock the sponging was to be repeated. Sophie was instructed how to do it. But when eleven came, Jean refused utterly to be touched. "No, Sophie, no. I can't have it. You see, I have to lie *practically naked* while it's being done. It's awfully kind of you, but I don't even like Mamma doing it. It's so terrible to have no clothes on." And in spite of her conscientious efforts to gain her point, Sophie was defeated.

"Shall I waken Alison? You surely can't mind your own sister?"

"Never. You must not suggest such a thing. I could never let Alison see me undressed."

Possibly it was because Dr. Parfamont's directions were not carried out as faithfully as they should have been that Jean appeared little or no better when he called. The fever was no lower, and the girl seemed completely exhausted. She had no strength with clutching hand to resist his examination with the stethoscope.

Mrs. Hamilton began to be sceptical of the doctor's skill.

"I don't think young doctors are ever to be trusted. They recommend such strange remedies—fancy advising *bouillon de légumes* instead of good strong broth! I'll find out from the Consul whether there isn't a good English medical man in Brussels."

She hurried off to the Consulate late in the afternoon, in spite of the fact that Jean had improved during the day. The Consul gave her an address. He was not particularly encouraging, and advised her to continue with Dr. Parfamont, who had quite a name in the world of medicine. Mrs. Hamilton, a little shaken in her resolve, did some shopping on the way home, and got back to the *pension* at tea-time, with a bunch of hyacinths and a tin of Brand's Essence from the foreign chemist in her little basket. When she entered her daughter's room, she found Sophie sitting quietly there in the dusk. Jean was asleep.

"The doctor has been," Sophie whispered. "He says she is making excellent progress."

So this Belgian doctor, in his early thirties, had visited an unchaperoned, defenceless girl! She was indignant. These foreigners were outrageous. Her impulse of the morning was right; one should never trust them in illness. Besides, they had no proper sense of bedside etiquette. She would write him a note (a polite one of course) asking him not to call again. No English doctor would have examined a girl's chest without her mother being present.

"I don't suppose doctors consider themselves like other men," Sophie commented, blushing.

"A doctor before all else must be a gentleman," Mrs. Hamilton replied hotly. So Dr. O'Flanagan was summoned to attend Jean as soon as he could come round.

He came, unfortunately, after dinner. That may have accounted for his uncertain gait and flushed face. He shook hands with rather unnecessary enthusiasm, and his brogue was a little too rich to be pleasant; but was it his brogue only? You could have cut that with a knife, but Heaven knows what you could do about his whiskey-laden breath. Mrs. Hamilton hesitated to take him upstairs. Jean was resting peacefully, she told him, the temperature had come down beautifully. This was the excuse for not disturbing her to-night. Alison and Mrs. Hamilton stood their ground despite his remonstrances, and after a few minutes they felt relieved to see him descend the staircase. He stood swaying on the doorstep,

as if uncertain in which direction his home lay, then plunged into the thin sleet, lurched round the street corner, giving the lamp-posts an exceptionally wide berth.

"Is he a *gentleman*?" asked Sophie, without any malice.

"We shan't need any more doctors now, I've nursed measles so often," said Mrs. Hamilton, sliding off the subject.

Sophie's devotion to the sick-bed touched Jean's mother, and from the date of the measles Mrs. Hamilton began to love her as a daughter.

The convalescence was taken seriously. Jean was not allowed out for some time without a respirator. She aroused some curiosity in the streets of Brussels, as she walked along the sunniest boulevards, with this black gag fastened by an elastic across her lips, and even in the house she was exhorted to hold a shawl (it was called a "cloud") to her mouth, as she moved from room to room, for fear there should be an open window anywhere. The mother knew all about delicate lungs; one could take no risks with them.

As Jean had to be kept so much indoors, an order for books was sent to Mudie's. They arrived twice a month, and in after years Sophie was always a little confused about Sankey and Moody. Had those revivalists anything to do with the lending library? These parcels of books, and an occasional other parcel which came from the Army & Navy Co-operative Society, were the only contacts with England. Mrs. Hamilton always talked of

the Army & Navy, and Sophie, again somewhat confused, could never comprehend why the forces of the Crown undertook to send the widow all she wanted in the way of tea and guava jelly, and beautiful thick flannel for her daughters' petticoats.

But the flannel-petticoat season was ending. Summer had come, and it was decided that the holidays should be spent at Ostend. The air would be beneficial to Jean and Maud, and all the girls loved sea-bathing. In July and August the long reaches of white sand stretched before them endlessly from their hotel windows, and the family lived on the beach. But they could never persuade Sophie to bathe with them. She had once been all but drowned in the Neckar, and nothing would induce her to take the water. So she sat beside Mrs. Hamilton under a green-lined parasol and watched the four girls bobbing about around their bathing-machine, holding ropes attached to it, and splashing ecstatically in their navy-blue serge bathing-gowns which had long sleeves and full tunics bordered with white braid reaching to the knees, above bloomers which fastened just above the ankle. A red or white anchor was embroidered in the little V-shaped dickey they wore underneath the tunic. The girls came out of the sea one by one so that each had the bathing-machine to herself whilst dressing. You ascended or descended its steps under a tent; the bather was invisible before total immersion. It took ages to dry their waist-long hair, so Mrs. Hamilton ordered them to wear bathing-caps. These were of black-and-white-check

waterproof, such stuff as sponge-bags are made of, and like so many other things were forwarded, Sophie gathered, through the good offices of the Admiralty and War Department.

Even at Ostend the habit of Evening Prayers was not suspended. It was a little more difficult here, as they had no private salon. Mrs. Hamilton read them in her bedroom, sitting on a chair on which was laid out her nice purple nun's-veiling dressing-gown, trimmed with swans-down. The girls brought in other chairs from their rooms. Sophie had grown fond of this pious institution now that she could understand the English prayers. One evening as she lingered to bid good-night, she said to Mrs. Hamilton, "I like the Litany, especially when you read out 'Have mercy on all women labouring with child.' I know then that you are praying for me and for all governesses. I am sure some have a hard time; but I can never understand that prayer which begins, 'O God who hatest nothing but the housemaid.' It seems rather sad and unladylike to condemn them all, but I suppose they deserve it."

Sophie could speak English fluently by the time they left Ostend for another winter in Brussels.

CHAPTER NINE

"True concord of well tunèd sounds."
SHAKESPEARE (Sonnet 8)

THERE WAS AN ENGLISH COLONY in Brussels. Mrs. Hamilton left cards regularly on all who belonged to it. She carried them in a little silver case, chased with a fern-leaf design. "Mrs. Hamilton and Miss Hamilton" was engraved on them, and the address of her old home in Fife, where she had lived before her husband died. The name of the *pension* was written in pencil in the other corner.

Alison had never been presented. Her father's death had occurred just when all was arranged for her to go to a Drawing-Room. It irked her mother to remember she had not made her curtsey on a summer's afternoon to the dear Queen, but Alison was indifferent. Later on the younger girls would no doubt be taken to Buckingham

Palace, and then there would be three more names below Mrs. Hamilton's on the pasteboard. Every month or so in the fine weather a tea-party was given by her to her friends among the English residents in Brussels and the girls contributed some musical performances, after full justice had been done to the pretty *pâtisseries* which decked the table. Very few gentlemen came to these afternoon receptions: the colonists appeared to belong to one sex only. But the English Chaplain always attended them; he was usually preparing one or other of the girls for confirmation.

Colonel Armitage, a retired artillery officer, and Sir Malcolm Watson, who had been in the Consulate here in his younger days, could be relied upon to accept. Mrs. Hamilton felt that her deep mourning (it was three years now since her husband's death) excused her from inviting the Minister and his wife. She had refused, on this score, an invitation from the Legation when she first came to Brussels. Amongst the Belgian society she knew very few people, and it was rarely that she was asked out to *déjeuner* or to dinner. She did not feel that, living in a *pension*, she was able to return hospitality, so her social circle was much restricted.

There were moments when Sophie felt that Alison's life was not what it should be. She was so pretty and young, and now that she had laid aside her black gowns her dazzling English complexion and sapphire eyes took on an extra loveliness from her coloured dresses. But Mrs. Hamilton knew no such qualms. Courtship,

marriage eventually, would come to Alison as it had come to her, and as it came to all nice-looking, nice-mannered girls. Men and women paired off by the law of Nature. The idea that Alison's youth was wasting never entered her head.

There was no marriageable man in Brussels anyway, and what could a girl want with a man who was a "detrimental"—a penniless younger son—a student, or a fellow who was not quite "one of us"?

Jean asked one day if her music-master might be invited to one of these little afternoon gatherings. Her mother enquired if she wanted to play anything arranged for two violins, but Jean said she had no intention of doing this. All the same her mother did not like to refuse. Jean had never been like Alison. She was a law unto herself. The anxiety about her lungs had singled her out for more pampering and indulgence; perhaps it was the wearing of the respirator and the habitual use of the "cloud" which made her different to her sisters.

Monsieur Achille Gutmann was therefore invited a fortnight before the fête. Mrs. Hamilton's card in a neat envelope which fitted it exactly was sent to him at the Conservatoire (nobody knew his private address). "Tea 4-6" was written at the top; and a charmingly worded acceptance, in which he offered Mrs. Hamilton his respectful *hommages*, followed by return of post.

This party would not resemble the rest, it would be as different as Jean was to Alison. It was an excitement to know he was coming, and added zest to the selection

of the cakes. A baba was ordered, "as men like the flavour of rum." It was fervently hoped that Sir Malcolm would not fail to turn up; at times he excused himself at the last moment on the score of his asthma. His presence would keep Monsieur Gutmann in countenance, it was embarrassing for a man to be the only representative of his sex at a tea-party, and Colonel Armitage was unfortunately in England. He went to London always in time to attend the Derby.

The girls had new frocks to wear for the occasion. Connie and Maud were always dressed alike, and sometimes Jean and Alison made a pair; but Jean disliked this, she said it "looked silly." Jean had rather a rough way of speaking, which grieved her mother, but it was no use attempting to correct her.

How she was practising now; sometimes it seemed almost too much: too much certainly for her fragile constitution. Her fiddle was never silent, she was often too tired to stand before her mirror as she had been told to, in order to watch her bow-hand; she perched herself on the edge of a table to rest her tired feet. She was studying a concerto by Bruch. Her tone had improved immensely and her *attaque* was masterly. When she played she tied back her long hair, which reached her waist, straight and thick as rain, for it impeded her bowing. Connie and Maud would groan as for the fortieth time she repeated a difficult passage, but Alison, angel Alison, was always ready to accompany her, and the Pension Villemorin vibrated with music from dawn to eve.

When Connie practised too, upstairs in her bedroom, it was pandemonium, but Mrs. Hamilton never flinched. The girls were here for this purpose, and it was gratifying to see them take their work so seriously. Still, there was something a little unnatural in Jean's perfervid fiddling, and the fact that she now asked if she might have extra lessons was surprising. She had chosen to learn this particular concerto because Achille Gutmann was to play it at a recital he was giving—to hear his performance of this technically difficult composition would be of immense value to Jean.

Sophie was frequently present at the lessons, now bi-weekly. She liked young Gutmann. He had a flat swarthy face and low brow, over which the greasy meshes of his hair fell, at moments when the pyrotechnics of his virtuosity were most dazzling. Intelligence glowed in his deep-sunk eyes; Jean said he looked like Beethoven. His figure was unusually good. Whilst she played he stood opposite her, with his violin under his arm. If her phrasing displeased him, he would stop her, tuck his instrument under his chin, and play the passage himself with such perfection that the poor girl sighed in despair. Or sometimes he would play a page or two with her to indicate the tempo and the accents. Often half-way through the lesson she would collapse into a chair for a few minutes' rest, and the *maître* would take the silk handkerchief out of his case (the same which lay across the belly of the violin) and mop his moist brow. Sophie used to wonder whether this was the only

handkerchief he possessed, it was certainly the only silk one.

Gutmann's programme for his concert on the 8th contained the Bruch concerto (*Odyseus*), two suites by Bach, a Sonata by Brahms, and some arrangements by Sarasate, which would demonstrate his superb technique.

During the break, half-way through the lesson, Mrs. Hamilton would come in to speak a few words of encouragement, bringing a glass of milk for the pupil and a thimbleful of *porto blanc* for the teacher. Either Sophie or Alison was present the whole time of the practice, more often Alison, as she was frequently asked to play the pianoforte accompaniment. How acutely Sophie regretted not being able to do this! The presence of the young musician stimulated her, but she could only give the A when he asked her for it, and then she usually struck two notes together in her embarrassment.

The dresses which the girls were having made for the party occupied both time and thought. The dressmaker in the rue des Fontaines proposed that Maud and Connie should wear sprigged muslins tied with sky-blue sashes. Their skirts were voluminous, but Mrs. Hamilton vetoed dress-improvers for children in their early teens; Jean and Alison of course would wear them. Jean insisted on a grenadine of night-sky blue, and chose red poppies to adorn it. Its *pouf* was of moderate size—fashion was decreasing the volume—and prettily draped in a cascade of frills controlled by velvet ribbons and bunches of flowers. Jean was to put up her hair for this

festive occasion. It was to be dressed *à la Marguerite*, half raised in a chignon, and half falling in ringlets on her neck. Alison never departed from her Madonna coiffure, and her gown followed the lines of a *Polonaise princesse*, crossed in front, and opening above and below the waist. Mrs. Hamilton still wore her weeds, and the peak of her Mary Stuart white crêpe cap rested lightly above the first inch of her parting.

Sophie decided to exhume her pink tarlatan, and by adding a bertha of lace at the neck and the new type of sleeve called *engageant*, it would do service as an afternoon dress. As she shook out the crumpled frills and stroked the poor withered flounces, a wave of memory got her by the throat, suffocating her, forcing unexpected tears into her eyes. But she soon got over that: a party was a party even if Mutter and Julie and Richard—yes, Richard—were not present. It was unusual to have two palpitating entertainments in less than a fortnight—it was unusual to have one—and both these necessitated a lot of hard work.

Achille Gutmann, considering that his zero-hour was at hand, devoted a great deal of his time to Jean. It was wonderful of him, Sophie thought, to give her so much of it, for he would stand or fall by this his first recital. The lessons often lasted longer than the usual sixty minutes. Possibly he did not reckon in the pause midway. That was getting longer too. He sipped his *porto* slowly, and whilst he sipped he never took his eyes off Jean. Sometimes during the work he held her bow-arm,

circled her wrist with his strong square-tipped fingers, laid his hand on her shoulder to feel that it was working smoothly, and at the correct angle. When he praised her execution, he looked deep into her eyes, and she grew a little pale—or Sophie fancied she did—and whilst she played his foot beat time, as Jean's did, and Sophie fancied that their hearts pulsed together.

Poor Achille Gutmann! No wonder he was flustered at the prospect of his approaching concert. That agitation accounted for his leaving his music behind him at the *pension* one morning. He came back to call for it the same afternoon. Everybody had gone out, the weather was so enticing, intoxicatingly vernal.—Everybody except Jean. She was devoting the afternoon to the Bruch concerto, when he was shown into the salon.

"Mademoiselle, a thousand pardons, I was so distraït that I left my Bach score in your room. I apologise for deranging you, but I need it this evening for the rehearsal with the Conservatoire orchestra."

Jean began searching for it instantly under the huge pile of music heaped on the piano. She hoped she would not find it too quickly.

"I am naturally a good deal agitated during these days."

She looked up from her task. His voice changed.

"I am naturally much agitated when I am in your presence."

Jean held out the *partition*, but her hand shook a little.

"No trouble at all. Here it is, Monsieur Gutmann, please do not mention it."

"But I must mention it, I must mention my respectful adoration for you, I must lay my homage at your feet, declare my undying love for you."

He advanced a few steps to take the music from her, and as he did so he seized her hand and laid his lips on it. The mesh of his dark hair brushed her fingers. It had dropped across his brow, as it did when the shooting stars of his harmonics fell from his bow.

"Monsieur Gutmann, you must not say such things."

"And why not, Mademoiselle, since they are true? Bear with me for two minutes, for one minute, I must unburden myself—oh, the ecstasy of finding you alone!"

But they were not alone for long, not even for that one minute which Achille craved. Sophie's gay, slightly Teutonic voice rang out in the passage.

"Jean, Jean, where are you? I have a message from your mother."

Where was she? Jean herself scarce knew. He was holding both her hands now, and his eyes were scorching her.

"Let me go. They are coming; I hear them."

But Achille heard nothing but the voice of his passion.

"It's only Fräulein Sophie; she will not disturb us. Let me enjoy these moments in Paradise."

She broke away from him nevertheless, picked up her violin and held it to her chin. It was safer to be found thus—it would have been more realistic if she had held her bow, too, but she did not know where she had dropped it. She was quite calm now, though she did not

know how long the door had stood open, with Sophie waiting in its embrasure.

"*Ach*, here you are, why didn't you answer? Mrs. Hamilton asked me to show you this pattern of ribbon. She is downstairs. Is it the shade you want? There is a lighter one, but the dressmaker thought this the prettiest."

The sojourn in Paradise had been short, as measured by man-made time, but a little of its radiance lingered in Jean's eyes as Sophie looked at her. Achille Gutmann was standing by the piano.

"I came to fetch some music I had inadvertently left behind me after this morning's lesson," he explained. "I hope I do not intrude. I have found it now, and am departing *à l'instant*."

It had only lasted an instant, truly, but long enough to stir Jean's soul; nevertheless she was able to look at the pattern with close attention, and to answer Sophie in a level voice.

"That colour will do perfectly. I like it to be darker than the grenadine."

When she turned to the visitor he was standing at the door, and edging out sideways, bowing as he went. Sophie and he descended the staircase together. Jean laid her fiddle in its case and unscrewed her bow. She tidied up the music on the Erard; the Bach score was still lying on the top. Sophie, all a-twitter, for she sensed something had gone wrong, took it round later to the Conservatoire. Achille Gutmann had forgotten it a second time. Small wonder.

CHAPTER TEN

*“Auf Flügeln des Gesanges,
Herzliebchen, trag’ ich dich fort.”*
HEINE

THE PARTY DRESSES had been ordered to serve two purposes. They were to be worn at the Gutmann recital, and three days later for the At Home. The timid scoop of their décolletés made them suitable for both.

“At Home” was a euphuism, for nobody could describe the *pension* as home—still less Home, Sweet Home. Mrs. Hamilton could sometimes be persuaded to sing that ballad, and describe Patti’s rendering of it at the Albert Hall. To “feel at home” was another English idiom—you said you felt at home when all was *gemütlich* and harmonious. Just at present everything was the reverse in the Pension Villemorin. The girls were on edge, Jean especially.

Very little was now said about the party, though it had

been the chief topic of conversation for so many days. The mercury was low, and try as Sophie would to raise it, it still remained below the average temperature. What had caused its fall? Jean, of course, for Jean was always the cause of these meteorological disturbances.

The violin lessons continued, but Monsieur Gutmann pleaded that on the days immediately before his concert he would be unable to come. Mrs. Hamilton said she understood perfectly, and Sophie wondered whether she understood anything of what was happening in the salon whilst Jean and Achille were there together.

"Let us try the *Andante* again," he had said when he called for the next lesson. Jean was white and tired, and her strings were continually dropping below pitch. Several times whilst she played the movement she had to stop, and with her fiddle held against her raised knee, tune up the A and E. Gutmann waited. "The following passage is marked '*con amore*,'" he commented, and Sophie, standing beside Jean's music-desk to turn over, saw that no such direction was marked on the score.

Jean was playing abominably, but he, the most exacting of masters, appeared indifferent to her scratching tone and faulty phrasing. Long before his twenty-five francs had been earned, Jean turned to Sophie and spoke to her in English.

"Will you leave us for a few moments? I have something which I must say to Monsieur Gutmann. Come back when you hear me playing again—please stand outside the door, and come in if you see Mother on the

stairs." Sophie made an excuse for absenting herself, and stood sentinel in the passage.

It seemed an eternity to her. Time anyway for a long survey of the situation. What was she doing, obeying these mandates from Jean? It was an unwritten law that the girls should never be left alone with any of their masters. No "nice" girl would have liked a *tête-à-tête*; but Jean was more than nice, she was adorable. Sophie loved her more than any member of the family, in spite of her unexpected moods and boisterous manner. She would not compare her to a summer's day (Sophie was learning some of Shakespeare's sonnets); she was tempestuous and shower-laden, gleaming with alternate sun and storm.

Whilst she stood outside on the landing she began to query the wisdom of her acquiescence. The recollection of her complaisance with Bertrand stabbed her memory sharply. She had granted him the favour he had solicited, and how had it ended?—in disaster. Sophie could not allow this state of things to go on without at least consulting Mrs. Hamilton. And yet that would be a betrayal. Disloyalty to Jean, *geliebte* Jean, *Jean chérie*, darling Jean.

What were those two saying behind that closed door? What a relief if Mrs. Hamilton would return from the *pâtissier*. She had gone there to clinch the number of *éclairs*, of *choux à la crème*, and of *langues de chat* for the party. "*Je jette ma langue aux chats*"—that was a French idiom she had lately learned, and it meant "I give it up." You said that when you were nonplussed in a guessing

game. They played many guessing games in the long winter evenings, besides charades and "consequences." What would be the consequence of all this?

Perhaps Sophie *had* better give it up, this connivance with Jean; throw her tongue to the cats—not hold it for another moment. She had to betray someone; it was either Mrs. Hamilton or Jean, to whom she must be false. "*Semper fidelis*," Bertrand had said, but how can one be true to so many?

Why did the double-stopping of that passage they were practising not commence again? Achille had been alone with Jean at least five minutes. It was wrong to eavesdrop, but perhaps it was Sophie's duty now to listen for a while. She moved nearer the door, and strained her ears to catch the voices. Both seemed to be speaking at once. It was a blur of sound. And then a door opened suddenly—what door? Not any of the downstairs ones, and certainly not the front door or she would have heard the bell. No, it must be the door *à deux battants*, the double door which divided the salon from Mrs. Hamilton's bedroom, through which she had come into the salon the first time Sophie had seen her. It was never used now; in fact, a chest of drawers had lately blocked this exit from the bedroom. Whose hand, then, had moved the chest of drawers, turned the latch? She was not long in doubt. A silence had fallen on the salon whilst the door creaked on its hinges; now she could hear quite plainly Mrs. Hamilton's clear-cut tones.

Sophie's task was ended. The guard was relieved, the

sentinel dismissed. She felt a little faint and sick, and decided to go to her room, walking upstairs slowly, with a great weight at her heart. Over the banisters she saw Achille Gutmann. He was wearing his hat; his fiddle-case was under his arm. He appeared rather more untidy than usual; the left shoulder of his coat was lightly powdered with rosin, and the collar with scurf.

It was Friday. Sophie decided that she would go to a Lenten Service in the English Chapel which Mrs. Hamilton frequently attended at six. But she was not in her pew to-night; Sophie did not see her till supper-time.

The gowns came back from Madame Lambert in the rue des Fontaines the following morning. (The girls' dresses—Sophie was fixing her pink tarlatan at home.) There were cries of delight as they were lifted out of their long cardboard boxes. Maud and Connie's white muslins were a dream. They looked as if no human hand had fashioned them, spotless, fresh, and uncrumpled. Jean said, "Don't bother to unpack mine," but the younger girls insisted. It too was a dream, but of another sort, the kind that makes you toss restlessly on your bed, and wake half in ecstasy, half in anguish. Night-sky blue grenadine, mysterious and deep as the firmament, sapphire in some lights, black in others, and the poppies which adorned the *pouf*, held there by the velvet ribbons, were red as blood. "It looks quite nice," Jean commented drily as Sophie helped her to hang it in the wardrobe. "Nice" was a useful word, as comprehensive yet as circumscribed as "*aimer*." You could look nice,

and at the same time not be nice. Nothing that happened in the next few days was nice, and yet these very days had promised to be so delightful. The concert on Monday, and the reception on Tuesday with the *baba au rhum* (for the gentlemen) and the Chaconne of Bach which Jean was to play after tea. The Bruch concerto would have been too long, and arduous as much for the performer as for the audience.

On Monday morning Mrs. Hamilton asked Sophie to help her with some letters—they were called notes—whilst the younger girls were out walking with Alison in the Bois. “I have so many to write,” she said, “and I must get them off to-day.” Sophie sat at the secretaire in the window and Mrs. Hamilton dictated. The first was addressed to Sir Malcolm Watson. It began:

DEAR SIR MALCOLM,—I had hoped so much for the pleasure of receiving you on Wednesday, but owing to unforeseen circumstances I have to postpone my little party indefinitely. I trust that I shall have the opportunity of seeing you before we leave Brussels, very shortly. Yours sincerely, THERESA M. HAMILTON.

The next one was in French:

CHÈRE MADAME,—Je regrette infiniment que je dois remettre la petite réunion que je comptais donner le 17. Des circonstances imprévues m’empêchent de recevoir mes amies.

Croyez, chère Madame, combien j’en suis navrée, et recevez l’assurance de mes sentiments distingués.

LINDSAY HAMILTON

Mrs. Hamilton was sufficiently continental to sign all

letters to her foreign friends with her maiden name before her surname.

So they were going to leave Brussels! so the At Home was to be abandoned! Sophie's first reaction was an acute regret that she had gone to the expense of doing up her pink tarlatan. The addition of the bertha and the frills on the sleeves had been costly. Mrs. Hamilton had insisted on her buying an expensive lace for this, a "good" lace; she would never allow her young people to purchase anything that was not "good." If Sophie had known that the reception was not to be, she would not have altered her pink, and would have worn her Sunday dress at the concert. But was the concert also abandoned, for when would the exodus from Brussels take place? Of course she could not ask any of these questions, as bending over the blotter she wrote on and on, and the stack of notes rose on the table. Some of the less important guests were to receive Mrs. Hamilton's visiting-card only, posted to them with the curt words "unavoidably postponed" inscribed and heavily underlined.

The task was completed by luncheon-time, and Mrs. Hamilton appeared obviously relieved.

Before she went to her room to wash her hands (hands were washed frequently in this family, and it would have been heinous to sit down to any meal without ablution), she began to topic pleasantly:

"We ought to think about our evening cloaks for the night of the concert. Of course I shall have my sealskin, and the girls can wear shawls—I will lend Alison my

Paisley; but what about you, Sophie, have you got a suitable *sortie-de-bal*?"

Sophie had only got her bashelik, the red cloth wrap of Russian design—and nomenclature—which covered her head, neck, and shoulders. But that did not matter a jot—the important thing was that she now knew that they *were* going to the recital.

But did the girls know that they were leaving Brussels shortly? Sophie was the soul of discretion. As none of them spoke to her of it, she concluded the news was still secret. Strange that they made no allusion to the cancellation of the At Home. Perhaps that too had been kept from them. A little half-hearted joke was made by Jean (whose gloom was lifting) about the *baba au rhum*; she suggested that Dr. O'Flanagan should be invited to enjoy it, and was rebuked by her mother—"Rather bad taste, dear." To which Jean muttered, "I don't suppose *he* would think so!"

The concert was to start at eight o'clock sharp. They left the *pension* for the Salle Pleyel as the clock struck 7.30. The girls were so rolled up in shawls that only their bright eyes appeared above their wrappings. Mrs. Hamilton had found a black mackintosh for Sophie (it was called a "mack") so large that it assumed the proportions of a domino. Two *fiacres* transported them to the Hall.

The audience was already considerable. Sophie thought she heard a few strangled titters as they struggled into their seats in Row H. Perhaps they did look rather

queer, this procession of British females in their mummy-like wrappings; but as the girls seldom if ever went out at night, it was wise to protect them against the cold spring air, and a little ill-natured ridicule made no matter.

Gutmann's concert had been eagerly looked forward to. He was going to play to capacity. Soon every seat and *strapontin* was occupied. Some students from the Conservatoire, many of whom were his pupils, were allowed to stand at the back.

When he came on to the stage the applause was long and enthusiastic, but at the end of the Bruch concerto, Sophie thought it would never cease. Again and again he bowed, sometimes holding his fiddle under his arm, and sometimes, when he was recalled from back-stage, in his hand. What a favourite he was, and what a talent! The young folk at the back shouted their *Bravos* till they were hoarse, before he was allowed to commence on the next number.

Sophie was too *begeistert*—too swept off her feet—to look at Jean, who was not sitting beside her. Mrs. Hamilton was her neighbour, and Mrs. Hamilton clapped her black-gloved hands with fastidious approval.

The G-minor unaccompanied Bach sonata came next. It exerted a calming influence, and made an appeal to the less emotional and more intellectual section of the listeners, but the exquisite quality of his tone, the restraint and power of his interpretation were just as evident. He gave the Chaconne as an encore.

The first half of the programme had ended. During the interval the girls chattered like birds in a pie—all except Jean. She was pensive, and sat making notes on her programme. During the second half, Sophie leant forward to observe her. She sat at the end of the row. Jean's mood had changed, she was very flushed and agitated, and every now and then she threw her head back as if she were draining a cup of nectar. He had to play many encores. How good-natured he was to give them such a banquet!

"But this is the last," he announced, smiling and coming down to the footlights, "and for that reason I am going to suggest that some of my young friends here whose enthusiasm is richer than their pockets, should come close up to the stage. I hope no one will object if I invite them to stand in the aisles during this Fandango; many of the faces at the back I recognise as my pupils', and they may possibly profit by having a closer view."

What was it Jean was doing, in the general helter-skelter which followed? In such a scrum as it had become, it was impossible to see what was actually happening, for "those behind cried 'Forward!' and those before cried 'Back!'" An unseemly rush, a scene of almost unprecedented confusion. Those who had paid for the expensive seats were remonstrating at the invasion. But what did the students care? They were certainly not going to refuse such a good offer. In less than no time they had availed themselves of every inch of space immediately below the platform—and Jean was amongst them. Yes,

Jean had slipped from her outside stall and pressed forward with the throng. Her mother could see her now, parted from the family by eight rows of seats, much taller than the other girls and boys and more willowy, a lovely Eurydice gazing upwards at her Orpheus—and Orpheus had begun to play.

In five minutes the last caress of his bow was laid across the strings—and then they stormed the platform, all of them, Jean included. Mrs. Hamilton saw her being pushed from behind, and pulled from in front by the young men students who were already standing on it. Achille Gutmann was surrounded, mobbed. He was attempting to escape from them, pushing aside the scores which were being held out for his autograph, till he saw Jean, and then he paused in his flight to the green-room, paused—as she held out her hands. Mrs. Hamilton saw him bow low to kiss them both.

“We will wait in the *foyer*,” was all she said to Sophie. And it was in the *foyer* that Jean rejoined them.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

"Full knowledge of the rational spirit is a great
and high mountain."

RICHARD DE ST. VICTOR
circa 1134

MADAME VILLEMORIN HAD PREPARED some hot chocolate for their nightcaps. The jug stood beside the wood fire in the salon, and six thick blue-grey china cups were ranged around the table. Mrs. Hamilton presided.

"Will you have some chocolate, Sophie? will you, Alison? Won't you really, Maud? Would you rather have hot milk? there's plenty here. Connie, I know how you like yours: two lumps of sugar, Wait till I've taken off the skin. Where's the strainer?—and where's Jean?" (She had come home in Sophie's *fiacre*, which had followed Mrs. Hamilton's.) "Run and fetch her, there's a dear."

Connie came back to say Jean was tired and did not want any.

"I expect she is," Mrs. Hamilton commented in a level voice, and the girls looked at each other. They sipped their smoking-hot beverage. It was restoring. Eleven o'clock struck.

"I think we're all tired," she continued after a short silence. "We'll have breakfast at nine to-morrow. Ring for the waiter."

"Your dress isn't a bit creased, Sophie," said Connie. "Does mine look fresh too? I should be so sorry if it had to be pressed for the party. Ironing always takes the 'spunk' out of muslin."

"The party has been cancelled, girls. I am not giving one."

"Cancelled? Why?"

Connie dropped the sash-end she was inspecting.

"That is too long a question to go into to-night. As we are leaving Brussels early next week, I am not able to entertain just before my departure."

"But it would have been such fun, Mamma, and these dresses were made for the At Home."

"Where are we going? To England?" Connie asked, bewildered.

"I have decided to take a chalet in Switzerland, probably at Geneva, or perhaps Lausanne."

"It's too sad about the party," Maud murmured. "Monsieur Gutmann was coming; he is such a celebrity now. Oh, Mamma, *do* give it! We can surely put off going, just for a few days. There's no hurry, is there?"

"Bed-time, dear," said Mrs. Hamilton. "We won't have prayers to-night. Sleep well, and pleasant dreams."

The younger girls bent down to kiss her. Alison shepherded them out of the room, to make sure they undressed quickly. Sophie and their mother were alone.

"I shall say nothing to Jean to-night. I must have a talk with her to-morrow. Did she say anything to you on the way home?" Sophie shook her head. "I am glad I saw how things were. I'm glad I cancelled the party three days ago. I don't know what possessed the child. I hope we shall hear of a good medical man when we get to Switzerland. The mountain air should be beneficial; Brussels is low-lying. I shall go to Cook's to-morrow and find out whether we can send the heavy luggage on by slow train. The route is by Basle, I think. Perhaps Jean should have her breakfast in bed to-morrow—will you see to that, Sophie?—and she must start her Parrish's Food again, and not forget to clean her teeth after taking it—iron always discolours the teeth. Will you pull down the *tablier*? Those logs are nearly out; but I am always afraid of sparks."

Sophie obeyed like an automaton. She let down the gauze fire-guard, and moved to the table to light the bedroom candles and extinguish the two lamps.

"Sleep well, and pleasant dreams." Mrs. Hamilton's good-night formula was ever the same.

They went to their rooms in silence. Perhaps the girls were already asleep. At that age sleep should come quickly—the moment one's head touches the pillow. But

neither Alison nor Maud nor Connie was asleep, and Jean's head was not on her pillow.

The weather had changed again in the night. It was raining cats and dogs, pitiless, unrelenting rain, which drowned the streets and everything and everybody in them. Brussels had never looked more drab and woe-begone. Even Mrs. Hamilton wavered in her determination to go to Cook's. Sophie nobly volunteered to go in her place, but that would have been no use whatever. Sophie was not, and never would be a courier.

About midday there was a break in the clouds, and Mrs. Hamilton asked Alison if she remembered where she had put her goloshes. Sophie fetched the mackintosh which had served the previous night as her *sortie de bal*. She had been poring over the newspapers with Connie and Maud. As soon as their mother had gone out, they resumed their reading. "One of the critics says that he is a second Wieniawsky. His technique is flawless. Here, Sophie, do read this; it's all about the students mobbing him. Oh, I do wish I had got his autograph in my album. Will Jean get it for me?"

Sophie did not know. Jean was still in bed, and her mother, who had spent half an hour with her, had told her to stay there. She had been overdoing her practising very much and was thoroughly overtired.

"Read what it says about '*les belles étudiantes qui lui ont fait une ovation phénoménale.*' Jean was one of those, wasn't she? Did you look at Jean climbing on to the concert

platform? One could see her feet and ankles; one could even see *her legs* when she scrambled up. What did Mamma say? Nothing? What shall we say to Monsieur Gutmann when he comes for Jean's lesson to-morrow? Isn't it to-morrow, Sophie?"

But Sophie did not know. They had been altering the days and hours of the lessons lately. The girls had better not bother their mother about it, she was far too busy just now, she said.

The afternoon was spent in packing. It's funny, thought Sophie, that packing and emotion always go together. I suppose they always will, till death. And death itself is just another packing-up, a final one: "*Scheiden thut weh*," "*Partir, c'est mourir un peu*." She associated trunks and boxes with moments of deep stress. Were they ever linked with happiness? But her distress was entirely impersonal. To-day she was leaving nothing of herself behind in the Pension Villemorin—less far than she had left in the rue des Ecuries d'Artois, for Bertrand had been there. She began to think of her departure from the Ludwigstrasse; that certainly had been a little death. Yet there must be joyful packings. When one was leaving home and going to be married, for instance, to pack up and go away . . . with Richard. That would be wonderful. If Jean were packing now—at this moment—for a journey . . . with Achille Gutmann!

One would put in one's underclothes—so; one's nightgown—so (she blushed foolishly); then one's chemises and drawers below another stratum of petticoats—every-

thing was fitting into the tray of the trunk beautifully—camisoles above. When she had got all her underclothes in, she would go to help Alison, and later on Jean. It was a good thing to get well ahead with her own trunk. Mrs. Hamilton had said that she would try and get tickets for the night train to-morrow if Jean were well enough to go.

Sophie was a little afraid of seeing Jean, and would leave that till just before *déjeuner*. Possibly Jean would get up for *déjeuner*; Mrs. Hamilton had said that she had no temperature. It was close on twelve o'clock before she went and knocked at her door.

No, certainly she had no temperature, but she was deathly pale, and she was sitting up in bed writing. A long letter, a difficult letter, judging by the amount of notepaper she had used. Many sheets were scattered on the eiderdown, and many more had been torn up in little fragments and were lying on the floor. Jean had not braided her hair the night before, she had been too tired, no doubt, to comb out and plait the brown tresses. They flowed down long and straight as rain on either side of her white face. The "cloud" was round her shoulders and across her breast. She scarcely looked up as Sophie entered.

"Is your headache better?" Sophie inquired tenderly, peering at her intensely with her short-sighted eyes.

"Yes—no. I'm just writing a letter—an important one. It will be finished in a moment. Have you got a stamp? I should be very much obliged if you would post it. Post it yourself, don't give it to the maid. Where's

everybody? Has Mamma gone out? When you have put on your jacket and hat, I'll give you the letter."

Sophie felt relieved. Here was something definite which she could do for dear Jean. She hurried upstairs to dress, but the letter was not quite ready when she returned. It was a very long one. Jean was still scribbling, in pencil.

"*Liebchen*, I shall be late for *déjeuner* if I do not go to the post now."

"All right, give me a pen to address it."

It really was finished, stuck down, stamped. Sophie took it from Jean's hand.

"Shall I bring you the *Courrier de Bruxelles* or a book?"

"No, give me my violin. I want to have it here—on my bed."

Sophie lifted the case and laid it at Jean's feet.

"Now run, Sophie, quickly; if you are late for luncheon Mamma will ask you where you've been."

So Sophie ran, and as she ran she read. She read the outside of the fat envelope which she held. It was directed to Monsieur Achille Gutmann at the Conservatoire.

But Achille Gutmann did not receive it that day. He was indisposed, *fortement grippé*, or perhaps the excitement of his concert had been too much for him, as it had been for Jean. He did not get the letter till two days after it had been written.

Mrs. Hamilton returned from Cook's office just in time for luncheon and the pre-prandial ablution. On the

doorstep she found a florist's boy with a cone-shaped parcel. "Mademoiselle Jeanne 'Amiltonne?" he inquired, handing it to her. "*Oui, c'est pour moi,*" she replied, and found a *sou* for him at the bottom of her purse. She peeped within the cone as she went upstairs. A large bunch of violets was nestling under the paper, and a card was lying on top: "*A ma bien-aimée.*"

But Jean did not receive the violets any more than Achille received the letter. Things so often miscarry, however careful one may be.

Mrs. Hamilton felt elated after she had washed her hands and smoothed her hair. Cook's office had been most efficient. They were to fetch the registered luggage that evening, and she had got the tickets in their little bottle-green pocket-book for to-morrow's journey safe in her bag. What would one do abroad without Cook?

Jean did not want any lunch. At one o'clock her mother carried to her room a cup of weak tea and two thin slices of toast.

CHAPTER TWELVE

*"Some dead lute-player
That in dead years had done delicious things."*

SWINBURNE

THEY HAD HOPED to find a small villa as soon as they got to Geneva. Mrs. Hamilton felt sure she would only have to spend a week or ten days at the Mont-Blanc Hotel. But it was not so easy to discover just what she wanted. The chalets that she inspected were either too large or too small or too expensive. And then so many of them had not got a *tout ce qu'il faut* which met with her approval. The *tout ce qu'il faut* was always a stumbling-block on the Continent. Some houses which the agent showed her had none at all—or at least none worthy of the name. Outside ones—in the garden—arbours—earth. Others would have been better had they been out of doors. The house-agent began to think that this English lady was too exacting, for it took her six weeks to find precisely what she required.

And whilst she searched, the girls led a somewhat otiose life. The lessons were fitful, unprofitable. Their mother had no time to organise their studies. It was just as well, perhaps, as the management at the Hotel Mont-Blanc might reasonably have objected to those protracted hours of piano, violin, and 'cello practice, which had made the welkin ring at the Pension Villemorin.

Connie neglected her instrument shockingly, and Alison only played in the evenings. As for Jean, on some days she did not play at all, and only opened her violin-case to gaze at it earnestly and dust the rosin from under the bridge, then replace it, with the silk handkerchief laid lightly on its richly coloured belly, together with the little bolster which she tucked into her neck when she played. Sophie noticed one day that the silk handkerchief was Monsieur Gutmann's. He must have forgotten it at the *pension*—possibly on the same day that he had left his Bach behind him.

The snow had all melted. Dazzling May weather spread itself over the land. The chestnuts were in full bloom. Pinnacles of white and pink blossom decked them. Under their boughs the ground was cream or rose-colour where the petals had begun to fall. The lake wore a metallic glitter. Mont Blanc—the real Mont Blanc, not the Hotel—could be seen daily without his top-knot of cloud. Mrs. Hamilton often read *The Times* aloud after supper. Queen Victoria had been proclaimed Empress of India. (Germany was an empire too, Sophie recollected with satisfaction.) The dear Queen was coming out of

her shell—that shell of crêpe and bitter isolation which had enclosed her for fifteen years, ever since the death of the Prince Consort. In February she had opened Parliament in person. What an effort it must have been after so many years! Mrs. Hamilton too decided to lay aside her widow's weeds. Life is made up of effort. It was five years since her own husband had died.

It seemed quite strange to see "Mamma" without her white faille bonnet-strings and the little Mary Stuart cap which had perched on her parting. She seemed another Mrs. Hamilton now, but actually she was the same; clothes do not alter people any more than do titles. Queen Victoria was the same Queen of England though she was also Empress of India. What a magnificent appellation, what a jewel in her crown—glittering and pure as the water in Lake Leman, as the Koh-i-noor which would adorn her diadem.

Sophie's letters from Stuttgart came regularly once a fortnight; her mother forwarded Louise's letters to her too, all about London, which was very gay, as the Prince of Wales had returned from India. A Jew, Mr. Disraeli, had been elevated to the *Herrenhaus*, wrote Louise. He had become Lord Beaconsfield. Bismarck was offering the hand of friendship to England. The Eastern Question should bring the two countries together.

Anna wrote cheerfully from Paris. France had made a wonderful recovery; her indemnity to Germany had already been paid. The French were becoming rich again; it was a pity that the Chancellor had not asked for more

money. The French were said to have kept their gold in their stockings, and had extracted it reluctantly but quickly—it was all, or nearly all, now in the Exchequer of Germany.

She received a letter from Gabrielle, who was affianced. She was going to marry the Baron Paul d'Arençon ("*un charmant garçon*"). Everybody was enchanted. She invited Sophie to the wedding at St. Pierre de Chaillot. All the fashionable nuptial masses were celebrated at this church, Sophie remembered. It was in that new quarter, the Etoile.

The villa Mrs. Hamilton had chosen was in the high part of the town, not far from the University. It was extremely bare and clean. A lot of stress was laid upon the cleanliness of the Swiss (Sophie preferred the dirt of the Belgians) everywhere, except perhaps in the *tout ce qu'il faut*—but of course sanitation abroad was always infamous. The house was adequately provided with heating—that was essential—and two sonsy Swiss maids were engaged to do the work. They were raw and untrained, and Mrs. Hamilton had to instruct them in their duties. She was very particular on the subject of outgoing and incoming posts. All letters had to be brought to her bedroom.

Sophie felt vaguely depressed by Switzerland. There was nothing in Geneva of the *wildromantisch* landscape, so much admired in Germany, which she had expected to find and looked for in vain. There were no good shops, indifferent food, high prices, a polyglot population, and

few concerts. Yet Mrs. Hamilton kept on saying she was glad she had come: Switzerland was the land of liberty, all the great thinkers exiled from their own countries had found sanctuary there, but Sophie found only dulness. Unspoilt though she was, a sense of ennui damped her spirits; she heard with consternation that Mrs. Hamilton had rented the Villa Delphine for a year, with the option of continuing.

What Geneva was doing to Sophie, it was also doing to Jean. She was terribly "low." (That was one of her mother's expressions, and could be applied to the outer or the inner man.) In June the weather was really warm—so hot on some days that they were able to sit on the balcony during velvet evenings, watching the stars wink in the lake. No cloud in the sky, and only one, of Shetland wool, wrapped round Jean's neck and arms by her mother, who insisted that night air was nefarious.

"Now that you feel better," Sophie began (Jean was not feeling better, it was all getting worse and worse), "you must start to play again. You will lose your technique if you do not study regularly, and that would be sad, after you have worked so hard. Don't you like your new teacher? She seems rather a pleasant woman."

"I suppose she's all right, but I haven't felt inclined to play lately."

"Why is that, Jean, why?"

"Sophie, you don't need telling, do you? My musical life was with *him*, over there," and she turned vaguely towards the line of Alps; "if I could have stayed near

Achille Gutmann I should have gone far. He was my inspiration, my lode-star" (she looked up at Orion's belt). "Don't you see that it's all shattered? My violin will never sing to me again. Oh, Sophie, can you remember his? that was a swan-song, too. Why didn't he answer my letter? It's not fair, after what he said that evening."

"What did he say, Jean?"

"Don't ask, silly—what does a man say before he breaks one's heart!"

Sophie did not feel at all sure what was said on these occasions, but even so her gift of sympathy did not fail her.

"I think he would say 'Never judge till you know everything.'"

"Rubbish! What is there more to know? As to my fiddle, I should like to smash it into pieces. I would like to put my fingers into the F's and tear it limb from limb, thus"—she made a gesture though she could not help smiling at the absurdity of her simile—"and then I should like to break my bow across it."

"Oh, Jean! Your lovely violin, which cost such a lot of money."

"When I play now it's as dumb as a fish. Don't you hear that the notes are just meaningless echoes of what they used to be, when I played with him? I hate it, I hate being here. Bring it me, and we'll do it a mischief."

Sophie left the balcony reluctantly: what was Jean going to do? She was really frightening in this mood, but

she must not thwart her. Jean pressed the springs of the case, and the lid flew open; the large white foulard as usual lay on top. She picked it off impatiently, then suddenly held it to her face, and burst into tears.

"It's no use talking, Sophie," she sobbed, "it's better to forget it all."

"Some day we will know everything—the whole truth," Sophie persisted. It was all that she could think of to bring comfort, but young as she was, she knew that the whole truth is never known.

In July they left Geneva for the mountains. It was too hot by the lake. Some people went across to Evian to do a cure, but Mrs. Hamilton wanted high air for her white-faced family. They stayed in a little hotel above Suchet and went for long walks suggested by guides, their mother accompanying them on mule-back. The foothills were gemmed with autumn crocuses; they stopped at chalets for drinks of coffee with their sandwiches. Sophie rather enjoyed these expeditions; walking through the winding paths of "needle" woods reminded her of days spent in the Black Forest. Not that these scrubby little pines and firs were comparable to those aisles of red-wood boles, like the close-packed masts of ships riding at anchor. Everything in Switzerland, excepting of course the towering snow-capped chains, was on a miniature scale—pocket-size. You could pack the view into your dressing-case. The firs were just Christmas-trees, and ought to grow with coloured candles, and balls of bright-hued glass on them. What made it all out of

proportion was the background of titanic Alps. God had put the mountains behind the playing-field of pigmies. The girls' mother led the procession on her chocolate-coloured mule, with a lavender-grey gauze veil floating from her sun-hat; the girls trooped behind with dust on their uncomfortably tight button boots. They tired quickly, but Sophie was as strong as a pony (and Jean used to say as obstinate as a mule, especially on the subject of Achille Gutmann). Jean returned to it frequently; once she asked Sophie:

"You are sure you posted my letter, sometimes you are so *tête de linotte*, so forgetful."

"Of course I posted it, Jean darling."

They spent seven weeks at Suchet and had grown terribly weary of the sunshine, the thunderstorms, the cow-bells, and the breakfast honey, before they got back to Geneva. The autumn crocuses had all withered, and hung dejectedly like pricked balloons on their leafless stems before Mrs. Hamilton paid her last bill. They drove down the valley in the diligence: on their return the Villa Delphine and Geneva seemed Paradise regained to the girls, especially the teas at Galignani's shop, where one could get both China or Indian, read all the English newspapers, and buy Tauchnitz novels. You could buy birthday books at Galignani's. Maude and Connie gave Sophie one; it was a novelty to her. They all wrote their names in it. Jean looked at it that evening in Sophie's room, when they were alone together. She opened the book at April 3rd.

"Whose birthday is that?"

Jean replied by writing "Achille Gutmann" in faint pencil. Sophie watched her.

"You know his birthday?"

"Yes—it was the day on which he gave his concert. He told me so." She felt a lump rise in her throat.

"He wouldn't like to think you were not practising."

She gave Sophie a smile, half grateful, half contemptuous, which encouraged her to continue.

"I expect he will be giving another recital soon. Oh, Jean, perhaps he's gone abroad on a concert tour. I feel quite sure that's what really happened, don't you? It must be difficult to write when one is on tour. We shall probably see something about him in the Brussels papers."

That was an idea. Suppose, thought Jean, that he came here, that she saw his name on the hoarding outside one of the concert-halls and on the handbills inside the shops. Supposing she was sitting in a red-plush *fauteuil* with her eyes closed (yes, she would have to close her eyes, it would be easier to keep calm that way) and that his fiddle spoke to her—explained to her how it was that he had kept silence. Why, then of course all would be understood, all forgiven—*tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner*.

The visits to Galignani's increased. Scarcely a day now that Jean did not go there on some pretext to pore over the newspapers. But oddly enough it was Maud who found the paragraph.

"Oh, Jean, look! how awfully sad!—here in the *Morning Post*—it's under 'Music.' Listen: 'We regret to announce the death of Achille Gutmann. This talented young violinist, who gave promise to rival if not surpass the greatest virtuosi of the day, died in London after a short illness. He had come here to play at a series of concerts, and contracted pneu . . .'"

Jean snatched the paper from her hand.

"That's enough," she interrupted roughly.

"Wait, there's a lot more about him; let me read the whole."

But the musical correspondent of the *Morning Post* was not fully informed. He did not give the full story—or the whole truth. Only Mrs. Hamilton could have done that.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

"He fares not well who says farewell to thee."

SHAKESPEARE

SOPHIE KEPT A DIARY as well as her new birthday-book. It was the age of diaries, when life travelled slowly enough to permit of a daily entry in a morocco-bound journal. She had quite a row of these small volumes now. They formed pleasant reading in retrospect. She had begun the habit in 1876, and the years 1877, 1878, 1879, 1880, up to 1885 sat side by side on her book-shelf. Records of sojourns at innumerable educational centres and at health resorts were faithfully entered—the day-by-day events at these objectively observed. The last four volumes were concerned with London. Often she opened one at random and read it through. Amazing to recall the fact that when first she began to write Connie and Maud wore their blond tresses in pig-tails, Alison was unmarried, and Jean was only just seventeen.

This year's diary, in maroon leather, had been purchased at the Army & Navy Stores. It had become one of her haunts, as it was Mrs. Hamilton's, very accessible from Harrington Road. She took the Underground from Gloucester Road Station and endured the mephitic sulphur-coloured fumes till she stepped out at Victoria. Sometimes she went by omnibus, but it was always painful to her, especially on wet days, to see the poor sweating horses straining to collar up after each halt.

105 Harrington Road, after all the wanderings, had become home. Mrs. Hamilton had bought the trust lease of this large gaunt house. It was too big for her really, with only three of her daughters to occupy it, but her eldest son often wanted a bed when he came up to London from Scotland on business, and it was nice to be able to put up Alison and her husband and small son. Jean's room was often empty, she used to winter abroad frequently. Jean had not grown easier with the years, and her lungs were still a source of anxiety.

Absurd to think that Connie was a young woman of twenty-four, and overwhelming to realise that Sophie herself had passed the mature age of thirty. Mrs. Hamilton did not alter with the march of time, but the girls did, of course: they were extraordinarily changed, and what also was entirely different was the world they lived in. Sophie wondered what had happened to it: it had become rough, boorish, disobliging—independent, Mrs. Hamilton termed it. Nonsensical, for no one can

be independent, not even if—unlike Sophie—one is in possession of independent means. Alison's husband, when she married him, had been described as a man of independent means. Maud's *fiancé* was dependent on his profession, the Army. Even when independence does not hang on pounds, shillings and pence, you still depend on something or somebody. It is people that you depend on much more than income. Sophie's life was inextricably bound up with the lives of others. She was a parasitic plant which grew and flourished on another, like mistletoe on an oak, or an orchid on some tropical tree. She liked the latter simile; mistletoe suggested promiscuous kissing, or being locked up in a chest for ever; but a cattleya in deep shade above the waters of the Amazon (did they grow there?) was a beautiful one. She began to realise that she had become too much of a parasite here, her work as governess had ended; she was only staying on at Mrs. Hamilton's urgent request. Her own sisters advised her to leave. For some time, owing to the girls' pleadings, she resisted, but the arguments of her family finally wore her down. They warned her that she was losing her technique of teaching, was becoming a drone, a nothing, neither governess, nor secretary, nor companion, and even if she termed herself the latter, it was a poor calling, as her sister Julie knew. Louise Bühler, who had been in England now for many years, insisted that she knew the perfect setting for Sophie—a governess' place: two little heads to furnish, vacant possession to be obtained at once. Sophie was inter-

viewed by her prospective employer, the matter was clinched. . . .

The last day at Harrington Road dawned. She was packing her belongings. A huge Noah's Ark of a trunk was being filled with them; it would be sent back to Stuttgart. It contained the flotsam and jetsam of her years of exile. Photographs of the girls at every age and stage taken at Brussels, Bruges, Geneva, Montreux, and Chamounix. Presents made to her in all these various places, books which had been read aloud to them, unwanted clothes which might be useful to those in the Ludwigstrasse.

Jean sat in her bedroom and watched her fold and unfold, sort and tidy. The objects she was taking with her seemed very few; it was part of Sophie's philosophy to travel light. She needed none of those things which, charged with memories as they were, she was sending back to Württemberg—her heart was her treasure-chest.

Jean was profoundly depressed. She felt she was being deprived of a wind-screen, and would be exposed henceforth to the unbroken breeze of her mother's personality. Where Sophie was there was always shelter, a moderate temperature, and an equable climate of mind. The younger girls were better able to weather their mother's asperity. Besides, they were more sanguine of the future. Connie had optimism, and Maud had her young man.

"Aren't you sad to be going, Sophie?" she asked.

"Of course I am, but one must grow accustomed

to goodbyes, one has to say so many." She continued to brush her dark-blue serge skirt vigorously, then laid it on the bed.

"You will be so lonely, with only tiny children to talk to—and far away in the country, too."

"I love children, I am never bored when I am with them. They grow up so quickly, too quickly; one ought to be able to bottle them, like young gooseberries or green peas. I shall make a doll's-house for these when I get there, and play with it myself."

"But when they grow up they won't need you," Jean persisted.

"There are always children," Sophie answered smoothly, "and the children of children."

"You haven't a notion how tiresome kids can be, English ones especially, and there's sure to be a jealous old Nanny who will quarrel with you, and at night when they've gone to bed you will be quite alone."

"There are always books."

She was invulnerable. It was true about reading; Sophie enjoyed it. She read slowly and conscientiously, and she had certain favourites which never grew stale—*Jane Eyre* still, *Les Trois Mousquetaires*, *Les Misérables*, the *Reisebilder*, and *Werther*. Her three languages afforded her a wide range. She was sensitive to style, and though the finesse of the author sometimes eluded her, she recognised the giants in literature, and she saluted them. Heine's bitter-sweet prose and verse, for instance, held fascination. She knew scores of his passionate lyrics by heart;

they were as familiar as the Volkslieder of her childhood, and just as moving.

When books were not forthcoming, or she happened on one she could not get on with, she fell back on her store of memories. They were vivid and varied, richly coloured and crystal-clear. Even now as she was packing, the objects she was putting away brought back incidents of the last ten years with such insistence that she could only lend half an ear to Jean's gloomy forecasts.

Here was the little carved bear on a toboggan which Connie had given her at Geneva. It was on the day her mother had been so cross with her—there had been all that fuss about her going for a picnic on the lake with those English people Mrs. Hamilton had not liked—and here was the birthday-book with poor Achille Gutmann's name pencilled in it. Now she held a puff tied with a top-knot of pink ribbon. That was from Gabrielle's mother—an old Paris cotillon favour—not a useful gift to Sophie whose small nut-brown face had never felt the caress of eider-fluff or powder, but it brought back the costume the Countess had worn at the ball given by the beautiful Comtesse de Pourtalès—a sheath of satin moulding her like a glove. Sophie's gas-lighted bedroom seemed for a second to be illuminated with the bright orient of that *vert-du-Nil* drapery.

"It's scarcely worth while sending *that* back to Stuttgart."

"*Ach was!* one never knows." And Sophie with squirrel-like husbandry sunk it into a corner of the Noah's Ark.

A photograph in a silver frame of Mrs. Hamilton with her four daughters around her followed it. Sophie gave it a last fleeting glance. The mother was still wearing her weeds at that date. Her chiselled features showed dead-white against the dark veils. The girls, long-haired, long-shanked, were grouped round her, standing, sitting, kneeling; their light stockings and button-boots were prominent under pleated skirts. Some wore jaunty boater-hats, the others were bareheaded. "Do you remember this one?" asked Jean, peering over Sophie's shoulder. Did she remember? of course she remembered—everything. Remembrance was her wealth, her capital, untaxed, inalienable. That photograph had been taken at Brussels, six months after Sophie had come to them.

Happy times those; they had all been happy times really, these wanderings on the Continent, following knowledge like a sinking star, Mrs. Hamilton leading this educational Odyssey. Sophie wondered now, what it had all resulted in. The girls were certainly proficient in two foreign languages; two of them had become first-rate amateur musicians; but already they were beginning to make mistakes in their French and German genders; their practice hours were shortening, often they were entirely omitted. Connie's 'cello and Jean's fiddle were pieces of furniture kept in the drawing-room under the piano.

Sophie felt an undercurrent of restlessness and discontent, a marked indifference to all those things which formerly had meant much in the lives of the girls. They had turned against music and *Kultur*. Jean talked of

training as a hospital nurse, and her youngest sister wanted to start a dressmaking establishment.

And what conclusion was Sophie coming to? She knew it was nobody's fault, for everyone had tried, tried hard, Mrs. Hamilton harder than any, but it had been a losing battle. These young, tall, "nice" English girls were going to break away; they were not docile as German girls are, they were not resigned as Sophie and her sisters had been. They were straining at the intolerable tightness of the leash; soon it would snap. It was no longer the *Daisy-Chain* world (she had read all Miss Charlotte Yonge's works) they lived in, but quite another sort where young women—*ladies*—demanded a profession, and a profession other than teaching.

Sophie had no ambitions—that was fortunate. She was utterly satisfied; she did not now desire marriage, for she could make other people's children her children, another person's home her castle. Was it, she wondered, that she feared responsibility, or was it that life actually needs a few detached beings who tuck into its odd corners as the powder-puff tucked into the Noah's Ark trunk? Such an unattached person must of course be as soft and pliable as a puff, and take up very little room—a modest thing, weighing nothing, which may be left on the dressing-table, and seldom brought downstairs—never if there is company.

Then, as Sophie slipped her shoes into brown-holland bags—it would have been indecent according to the Hamilton tradition to let them travel in any other way—

she reflected on this education business. Everything connected with the education of these girls had been costly, and ought of course to have been money well spent (she was German enough still to prize culture far above rubies), but English folk did not seem to care a rap whether you had ever heard of Schiller or Goethe, or read a line of Racine. Culture was a plant that in England required a specially prepared soil; that of South Kensington did not suit it. It would perhaps have been better if these girls had been trained as competent *Hausfraus*; not that they would have liked that. No, they wanted pleasure and (Sophie blushed) men. She had never wanted either. Duty was her totem.

It was the scarlet bashelik she was folding now; it brought back memories of her journey from Stuttgart to Paris and the day which preceded it—the ball at the Leopold Saal, and Richard. *Ach Gott, Richard!* He was married now and had four children; she did not envy Richard's wife, a chattel, a drudge; every German woman was the bondsmaid of home and husband. Very probably English wives were just the same; then why did English girls desire husbands? Someone had said (was it Napoleon or Bismarck?) that "the hand which rocks the cradle sways the world"; for her part she was quite willing to rock other people's cradles. The babies inside would be every bit as darling. As cradles empty, there are always more babies to fill them, an inexhaustible supply of babies—even in this strange new world they had not gone out of fashion. That was a comforting thought.

PART
TWO

ZELLIE

*“The least touch of their hands in the morning,
I keep it by day and by night;
Their least step on the stair, at the door, still throbs
through me, if ever so light;
Their least gift, which they left to my childhood, far
off, in the long-ago years,
Is now turned from a toy to a relic, and seen through
the crystals of tears.*

*“If I angered any among them, from thenceforth my
own life was sore;
If I fell by chance from their presence, I clung to
their memory more.
Their tender I often felt holy, their bitter I sometimes
called sweet;
And whenever their heart has refused me, I fell down
straight at their feet.”*

E. B. BROWNING

CHAPTER ONE

"It's a warm wind, the west wind, full of birds' cries."

MASEFIELD

SHE BROUGHT SOME PRESENTS to Easton Grey wherewith to placate the children, and this was fortunate, for she happened to arrive on Tommy Lister's seventh birthday, May 2nd, 1885. What she gave him was wonderful; a basket lined with pale pink satin, containing shells—shells which are to be found on far-away beaches, marvellously polished, spotted, pied, and striped. Some with smooth burnished surfaces, and rosy interiors, others with rugged dull outer skins, but rainbow-tinted when you turned them over. Twisted cowries symmetrical as if turned by a lathe, razor-shells lined with the orient of black pearls, scallops as big as a purse, and giant conches. The basket was emptied on the schoolroom table in the window, and Tommy exclaimed in ecstasy as each surpassed the other in beauty of shape and colour.

"Have you ever held a large one to your ear? if you do you will hear the roar of the sea." She pressed one close against his curls, watching his face, earnest first, and then the slow smile which broke across it. "Do you hear it?"

"Yes, I think I do," he whispered, afraid to interrupt the sound.

His sister Barbara wished this had been her gift. She did not care for the doll she was given that day, or indeed, for any dolls.

Tommy went on listening, rapt and tense. The thrushes and blackbirds were singing so loud on the terrace that he could not be quite sure.

"You listen too," he said, misdoubting his own judgment. Sophie took it from him, and held it to her ear. For a moment she wondered what the hollow surge could be—was it truly the echo of the distant ocean, or was it a confused murmur of voices, voices hitherto unknown, but which would henceforward hail her in this strange new world?

It looked a bright-enough world as she saw it to-day through the large west window. A foreground of lawn with park beyond, across which tufted elms threw their misty shadows. Sophie had had no experience of English country. Mrs. Hamilton had usually gone to Eastbourne or Bournemouth during the summer months when she was not abroad, so she had never tasted illimitable fields, or gardens, or country-houses. The smiling one which she had entered to-day came as a surprise; scented and flower-filled, gay with white paint and

bright chintzes, books and pictures, it seemed to belong to an unexplored planet. The children, however, were not strangers, though she had never seen them till now. Germans would have described her as *furchtbar kinderlieb*—a true child-lover. They fitted into her being from the moment they gave her their first timid left-handed “How-do-you-do?” It was the grown-ups whom she feared.

Mrs. Hamilton had told her about the children’s parents. Lord Ribblesdale, she said, was the best-looking man in England; he had been one of the dear Queen’s lords-in-waiting, and Lady Ribblesdale was graceful and charming. Mrs. Hamilton never talked of anybody as being clever or brilliant; that would have been tantamount to implying that a great many people were the reverse (most unkind).

Sophie at her interview had seen her, of course, before coming here, and had been impressed by Lady Ribblesdale’s tall willowy figure and soft curling hair, the colour of the angels; but she felt she could never grow accustomed to Lord Ribblesdale’s appearance. He was unlike anybody she had ever seen or dreamt of, a character of romance, so tall as to make her seem a midget, and so fine as to make her feel a beggar maid. He had smiled at her, nevertheless, and addressed her in French as pure and idiomatic as Count Melchior’s. Then there were Uncle Graham Smith and Aunt Lucy, the owners of Easton Grey, this Wiltshire house which looked down on winding Avon.

The stage was set for the schoolroom life of Tommy and Barbara Lister. Nothing that child-heart could desire had been forgotten. Even the plates and cups they used at breakfast and tea bore delightful pictures of Early Victorian children in crinolines and pantalets handed down from older schoolroom days and other children, as were the mahogany cribs in the night-nursery, with cane panels lined with sprigged chintzes. More freshness and sweetness could not have been bestowed on any curly-headed boy and girl.

Sophie was eager to meet Aunt Margot and Aunt Laura. They did not live down here, but appeared, comet-like, occasionally, leaving a tail of light and wonder behind them. Mrs. Hamilton had said:

"I expect you will see a great deal of Miss Margot Tennant. She and her sister Laura are the daughters of Sir Charles Tennant; Lady Ribblesdale is their older sister. Laura has just married Mr. Alfred Lyttelton,¹ the great cricketer" (how strange, mused Sophie: she had not thought of cricket as a married man's profession). "It's a hunting country where you are going—lots of riding," Mrs. Hamilton had added, and that too was puzzling. Hunting meant shooting in Germany. She knew nothing of sportsmen who galloped after hounds and foxes on horseback.

¹ Hon. Alfred Lyttelton, K.C., eighth son of 4th Lord Lyttelton. Born 1857; died 1913. Four years in Eton XI; four years in Cambridge XI. Played for England v. Australia. Called to the Bar in 1881. Entered Parliament in 1895. Selected by Mr. Balfour for Secretary to the Colonies. Held this office for two years, till 1906.

But how quickly she grew into it all. The scales of Harrington Road fell from her eyes, its very language was forgotten. Nobody here used the same expressions. Everybody was different, but in her faithful heart she never cried, "the King is dead, long live the King."

Some of the new existence was infinitely pleasanter, some more difficult, all of it more exciting.

She even had a new name, which Lady Ribblesdale invented. "Sophie" brought her too near the children; it was feared that Christian name terms might weaken her authority with them. "Mademoiselle" (she was to speak French with them) was too stiff, so just the latter part of it was used. Sophie became Zelle, or more often Zellie—Zelle to everybody, to the children, to their parents and relatives, to the numerous neighbours who poured in for luncheon or tea, and to the visitors who came to stay. Her schoolroom, sacrosanct territory, was invaded more frequently than she liked, but very soon she became showman there. People were invited to listen to the children read or recite in French. Their progress in the language was a feather in her cap, and she found it an irresistible temptation to make them go through their hoops.

Her system of teaching the language was quite her own. There was a book which she cherished as fondly as the scholar does the Rosetta Stone, on which the foundations of learning rest. By her it was called "*Madame Naslin*," or "*le livre de Madame Naslin*"; its true title was forgotten. Very torn and battered, precariously held

together, as its back was coming unsewn, it never left her hands. Illustrated with jejune woodcuts, it had a curious charm for her young pupils.

On the first page was a picture of a boy astride a rocking-horse (*circa* 1830), the letterpress, big and black below.

Un cheval. Un garçon. JE VOIS
un petit garçon et un grand cheval.

The reading of this lesson became an incantation when it was read over and over again by the children, with Zellie's voice guiding theirs. Each page bore an equally preposterous woodcut and sterile legend. Zellie's insistence on the correct diction was soul-destroying but effective. She never translated the French into English, relying on the illustrations.

The Lafontaine fable, *Le Renard et le Corbeau* was taught them as a parrot learns, only when they were word-perfect did it hold any more significance than Abracadabra. In two months Zelle was talking French to them, and they understood: like Abracadabra, it was black magic. The next step was the enjoyment of that nursery classic, *Les Malheurs de Sophie*; all the enchanting literature of *La Bibliothèque Rose* opened up before them. So much for lesson hours.

The summer days flew by, while Tommy and Barbara were fast becoming bilingual. Kingcups and watercress on the margin of grey Avon, strawberries under the garden nets, mushrooms like fairies' buttons in the

pastures (or like the pink shells when you turned them upside-down), Sarah Ann the garden-woman to act as guide, philosopher and friend to the schoolroom party.

She was to be found in the Long Walk with her mauve sunbonnet on her head, hoe in hand. Under the bonnet her red hair gleamed fiercely bright as marigolds. Mr. Stubbins, the head gardener, with his St. Peter's beard twitching angrily, watched her being led away captive to search for all these treasures. She was always ready to leave her work. They walked her in triumph through fields thick with buttercups; their boots were dusted with gold when they returned from these rambles.

Halcyon days, and now and then that flying jewel which is a kingfisher—the halcyon bird—skimmed past them on the river. "Wish, Zellie, you must wish!" called out Tommy, who had sighted it. But what could she wish for more than this? All other life seemed to have receded from her in her oneness with the children. The years which divided her in age from them vanished. She became as childlike, as rapturous. "Except ye become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the Kingdom of Heaven"—but she was there already, and she knew not how!

Uncle Graham said that the hounds were going to kill a May fox; they always did. The children were to go in the dog-cart to the meet at the Monument. The sun was hot, and the horses' feet raised clouds of dust as they thundered past. The hunt servants in their bottle-green plush were uttering strange cries as the pack moved off

with Lord Worcester's ¹ horn leading them on. The old Duke,² in blue and buff, a courteous diplomat with mutton-chop whiskers, stopped to speak to Tommy and Barbara as they stood up on the seat of the dog-cart.

Zellie never saw the fox, but there was much talk of killing. How could one kill anything on such a day, in a landscape quivering with loveliness? But Tommy was bloodthirsty, and as the second horsemen jogged past him on the road he inquired eagerly, "Have they got their fox, have they killed him?" The woods rang with view-holloas; hounds and horsemen disappeared down their branchy aisles.

This was Zellie's first sight of fox-hunting, her formal introduction to horse and hounds. Later years made her familiar with the lore pertaining to them. She learnt the phraseology, rejoiced in the reports of good sport, good scent, good mounts, would stand patiently at the door of open boxes on Sunday and timidly offer carrots to the softly blowing noses of sleek hunters, sympathise with tales of their "legs" and over-reaches, watch the cavalcade of grown-ups and children depart for the meet on grey winter mornings across rain-drenched pastures whilst the sky was still black-grey, and the snowy whiteness of leathers and the blue of the Beaufort coats made the only patch of colour in the monochrome of landscape.

¹ Marquess of Worcester, afterwards 9th Duke of Beaufort. Born 1847; died 1930.

² Duke of Beaufort, 8th Duke.

Little Tommy soon became a hunting character. Before he could read English with any fluency what he did not know about the science of hounds was negligible. Zelle delighted in the story of the day when, held up by a hairy fence, Lord Worcester was turning away from it to find a gate, that child, bareheaded (for his curls somehow always succeeded in dislodging hat or cap), called out to the Master cheerfully from the back of his diminutive pony, "It's all right, sir, I'll go first, and make a hole for you."

Spacious Beaufort country, full of gracious homes tenanted by people whose existence was centred on this strange sport, deriving from it communion of spirit, solace from most ills—she loved it. Villages of cream Cotswold stone, where the passage of the hounds meant a holiday for old and young. They were met with smiles and benedictions from every cottage door. Coverts in the dips of valleys, gorses on windswept tops, withy-beds in the neighbourhood of the river, she got to know them all by name. Led by the girl and boy when they heard the music of hounds she played truant with them during lesson hours. At Bransdown Gorse Tommy would say he had seen the fox double back; but Zellie never saw it, never in all those years did she see any fox, she was far too short-sighted. "*J'ai la vue basse*," she used to say on these occasions, as on many others. Her myopia was a strength. Perhaps we should none of us see too far, too far ahead: the distant view might discourage.

Zellie wrote to her sister Louise frequently. Louise

wanted to know all about the folk who were coming and going at Easton Grey. What was Miss Margot Tennant like, and Mrs. Alfred Lyttelton; they were the intimate friends of Mr. Gladstone and Lord Tennyson, she had heard say? Zellie did not know much of any of these people. Lord Tennyson, she knew, wrote poetry. Mrs. Hamilton had got a volume called, she thought, *The Idols of the King*; but how could that be, for the Prince Consort, subject of the dedication, was no reigning sovereign, and she was quite sure he had never worshipped idols (not female ones, anyway).

Mr. Gladstone had been talked of scornfully by Mrs. Hamilton, although he was called the Grand Old Man in some of the newspapers. At Easton Grey they spoke of him as Mr. G. She had been told in Harrington Road that he was a very wicked statesman, though he certainly was old and—possibly—grand. But so far, Zelle had to admit, she had met neither of these celebrities, and the young Miss Tennants, whose Egerias they were, she had only seen once or twice. They were both pretty and madly gay. Miss Margot did a lot of wild things, and stories about her reckless riding, and equally reckless speech, were rife in Wiltshire.

Aunt Lucy was different—she loved *Kultur*, and enjoyed quoting Heine to Zellie. Sometimes Lady Ribblesdale sang the Schumann *Dichterliebe*, and Zellie listened to

*Wenn ich in deine Augen seh,'
So schwindet all mein Leid und Weh.*

That was what had happened when she looked into

Tommy's hyacinth-blue ones, but the next line was less applicable:

Doch wenn ich küsse deinen Mund . . .

One did not do so to the children. It was not hygienic or seemly—

So werd' ich ganz und gar gesund.

Oh, Zellie was that, mentally and physically sound, pure as water, good as gold.

CHAPTER TWO

*"When the voices of children are heard on the green
And laughing is heard on the hill,
My heart is at rest within my breast
And everything else is still."*

BLAKE

IF LADY RIBBLESDALE had made Adelina Patti's favourite ballad her own, she would have to have sung of *Homes, Sweet Homes*, for at this period she had three.

There was Easton Grey in early spring and summer, in July Gisburne, and winter was spent at Glen. Actually she had no house of her own during these years, for Lord Ribblesdale was still soldiering, and his regiment, the Rifle Brigade, was quartered at Gibraltar. The children's Wiltshire uncle and aunt, Grandmamma Ribblesdale in Yorkshire, and Grandmamma Tennant in Scotland, held their doors wide open to the family, and the year was divided up between these visits. Zellie attuned herself perfectly to these changes, different as the keys were.

At Gisburne the Dowager Lady Ribblesdale welcomed her grandchildren eagerly. She was another of these bewilderingly beautiful people, possessing the majesty and stateliness which she had handed on to her son. The fact that she was living in an overgrown cottage at the gates of the Park only underlined these qualities; it was Granny who lent it charm and character. She loved the garden, despite the fact that, what with rain and slugs and the ignorance of John William, the gardener, flowers and vegetables grew reluctantly. But every plant was intimately known to her, had associations and *provenance*. The Croceum lilies had come from her home in Scotland, and were spoken of as Caldwell lilies, the violas had been raised by Aunt Addie, Aunt Sissy had brought the verbena cuttings from a garden she had visited in the South. The North was unkind to flowers and shrubs, but the struggle to keep them alive made them all the dearer.

Granny sat a great part of the day under a large yew tree within a few yards of the house. On a paved space round it stood chairs and tables. She camped here whenever the weather permitted. Two ring-doves in a wicker cage kept her company; her books and her little ormolu workbox were beside her. When the grandchildren arrived they were her chief occupation. She never allowed children to hang about "doing nothing," or rather doing everything that was most annoying to grown-ups. She liked to see them what she termed "a little busy," so she set them down to drawing or painting or bead-stringing, or she read aloud, or showed them large coloured plates

illustrating Scripture stories. Afterwards she would tell them tales of what had happened to her when she was a little girl—the picnics by the lochs when they grilled the trout they had caught, the hide-and-seek round the house, the long drives to the kirk, and the Sunday suppers of roast potatoes and buttermilk, till the Past melted into the Present and Granny was no longer the dignified slow-moving lady they knew, but had turned into a little girl called Emma Mure, romping round the policies of Caldwell House in Ayrshire.

The Old Testament pictures gave her an opportunity for Bible teaching, at which she excelled. She invested the stories with a vivid beauty which even these hideous coloured prints (probably German) could not destroy.

Daniel in the Lions' Den looked like a rotund bandsman in a beer-garden. Zellie did not understand why young Lady Ribblesdale laughed at him in his Roman toga; and at Elisha too, who had turned the joke against those rude little boys who had taunted him on his baldness, with the result that some chocolate-coloured bears in the middle distance had swallowed the scoffers whole, like pills, and only the necessity for the application of Harlene was left to point a moral and adorn a tale. Granny hypnotised the children by her Bible narratives, her vocabulary was as inspired as the original text. She knew that drama is weakened through the medium of reading, so the beautiful episodes of the Books of Kings fell from her lips, and left their mark on the hearts of the children. Her Scottish blood gave her an especial

facility for the task; the Covenanter's spirit of her ancestors illuminated her.

The guest-rooms at the Dower House were few in number, so visitors were limited. Mr. George Nathaniel Curzon,¹ said to be a rising young man, came to stay that first summer. He was ebullient and almost embarrassingly vivacious, but Granny Ribblesdale favoured him, for he belonged to the Tory Party. The fact that her son was in the Liberal camp did not meet with her approval. Young Mr. Curzon stood for the policy of his caste, for though he was a younger son he belonged to an honourable land-owning family, and was the champion of this order and of its fine traditions. At Bolton Abbey, twenty-five miles from Gisburne, lived Lord Hartington,² typical of the rugged strength and

¹ Hon. George Nathaniel Curzon, afterwards 1st Marquess Curzon of Kedleston. Born 1859; died 1925. Married daughter of L. Z. Leiter, Washington, in 1895.

² Spencer Compton, Marquess of Hartington, and 8th Duke of Devonshire. Born 1833; died 1908. Secretary of State for War, 1866; Chief Secretary for Ireland, 1870-74; Secretary of State for India, 1882-5; Lord President of the Council, 1895-1903. He had always predicted that interference with the "legislative union" of Great Britain and Ireland would break up the Liberal Party. The divergence of his views with Gladstone's grew after the latter began to negotiate with Parnell. In 1886, when Gladstone announced that he was about to embark on a Home Rule policy, Lord Hartington declined to accept office in his Government. He appeared on the same platform with Lord Salisbury a week after the introduction of the Bill, thus laying the foundation of the Unionist alliance between the Conservatives and those Liberals who were equally opposed to it. He moved the rejection of the Bill in the House. Over ninety Liberal members followed Hartington and Chamberlain.

simplicity of his Dales country. He had recently withdrawn from the Liberal ranks and become Chief of the new Liberal Unionist Party. It would have been better, thought Granny, if her son had thrown in his lot with the Tory Party. But her wishes were vain; Ribblesdale had married the daughter of a strong Gladstonian, and his Liberal creed was not to be shaken. Political discussion often raged fierce around the dining-table at the Dower House, and Granny grew agitated and went near to losing her self-control on the subject of Home Rule.

What Home Rule meant exactly Zellie did not know. She asked the aunts, who enlightened her as best they could. But it was a thorny question, and one which she felt only her great Bismarck could have solved summarily. Why were there two parties in England?—that had been so formerly in Germany, but since Bismarck's day there was only one, far more satisfactory. One statesman, one party, one Germany.

In the West Riding of Yorkshire country-houses are few and far between, there was no "neighbouring" comparable to what obtained in Wiltshire. A dog-cart was the means of transport; everything outside an eight-mile radius was socially inaccessible. Downham Hall, the seat of the Assheton family, was a house of call. The Lancashire witches had lived on Pendle Hill, which rises steeply behind the house. The name of Assheton appears in Harrison Ainsworth's book, which made Zellie's flesh creep; and for all she knew, witches might live there still. Some other names in it were current in Gisburne village.

She never entered Mrs. Nutter's little shop, where the children bought lollipops, without associating her darkly with those fearsome figures who rode the breeze mounted on broomsticks, and made their home on that blue mountain, Pendle, behind Downham. The outline could be seen distinctly from every prospect around Gisburne.

Some of the sweets at Mrs. Nutter's appeared to be made of plaster of Paris; faintly sweetened, they bore mottoes printed on them: "To the best of friends," "For dear acquaintance," "I am your Valentine." Lady Ribblesdale did not like the children buying them—acid-drops were the only kind they might eat. Tommy gave Zellie one of the white plaster shapes, and read its motto, "Love me always." She searched in the paper bag a long time before she found one to exchange with his: "Yes, I will." The one he gave her she kept in her work-basket till all the pink lettering had worn away, but the words were never effaced from her heart. He sucked his under the heavy chestnut trees which darken the front of the house, while he was looking for burrs which had fallen to the ground, and lay bursting out of their prickly shells in the deep grass. He filled his pockets with them. Conkers made a splendid game.

When the last leaves had blown off the trees, the family removed to Glen. Here was a complete change of venue and it meant a lot of readjustment for Zellie.

Glen stood in an enchanted valley, set round with heather-covered hills. It was not a country-house—it was a *Schloss*. A fine grey stone castle, pepper-pot turrets,

high-pitched roofs like a French château, it reminded Zellie of Cabours, but there was no indication here of dead or dying grandeur. All was spick and span, superbly groomed and appointed. The gravel was as meticulously combed as the children's curls, the lawns as smoothly ironed as their nightgowns. Only the hills were rugged and unkempt and *Ur-alt*. Everything else was new.

There was another grandmother here, much smaller than the one at Gisburne, but just as loving. She seemed to be made of old lace, pearls, and delicate aigrettes, but under these trimmings she was as simple, unassuming, practical, and philosophical as Sophie Bühler's own mother. Ostentation irked her, wealth discomfited her. She felt at home with simple people, chatting with the blacksmith's wife, carrying a stick of vanilla, wrapped up in her Valenciennes-edged handkerchief, to the factor's wife to flavour her rice pudding. Best of all she loved her solitary rambles in the garden. When scent-spray rain misted the hills and drove her into her conservatories and hot-houses, she would pause to wonder herself crazy over the beauty of the fringed lip of a *Cattleya Mossii*, or pick one bloom off a spray of orange-flower to hold it in ecstasy to her pretty aquiline nose.

Grandpapa Tennant occasionally complained of the immense expenditure of a garden of this size, the coke, the plants, what is termed the sundries (oh, the leakage on sundries which no one can ever budget for!). There was one house where pineapples were grown. "Each pine

we eat costs us five pounds," Zellie heard Sir Charles Tennant say whilst the dessert was being handed round; but he did not often grumble about money. It seemed to flow in (and out) of Glen as easily as the brown burns flowed down the hillside. Zellie had never dreamt of any place where pounds, shillings, and pence, less still where marks and pfennigs, did not prove an insuperable obstacle to any projected pleasure scheme.

Even the stumbling-block of distance was annihilated, for here you could drive as far and as often as you wanted behind the spanking bay horses which stood in the super-stables. A double dog-cart, or a phaeton, or a wagonette was always being driven round to the front door, and it was just as well that there should be this inexhaustible supply of what the Scottish call "machines," for to and fro, back and forth to the station they plied with arriving or departing guests. Zellie was naturally bewildered; but so was Lady Tennant, who did not know the faces, and sometimes the names, of those who turned up at Glen, invited by Margot.

Some came at the invitation of Sir Charles, but he was also a bird of passage, here to-day, and off to Glasgow (or Edinburgh or London) to-morrow, returning home from a night journey in time to appear spruce and sprightly at prayers before breakfast. His pointed white beard quivered with nervous energy; he went into ecstasies the moment the long row of servants had filed out of the dining-room, over some new purchase he had made during his absence—a picture he had bought from

Agnew, or a piece of furniture at Christie's, or some rare book offered him by Maggs or Quaritch. Every day he was filling his treasure-house; his taste was impeccable.

Lady Tennant was happiest in the schoolroom whilst the house brimmed over with these little-known and sometimes unwanted guests. She took refuge with the children and Zellie and poured her troubles out to her. "Margot is a most upsetting girl," she would say—and indeed she did seem to upset the young men who came. Like young Tommy, she was hunting-mad. Five horses in Leicestershire, and her father said he did not know where the money went! Nor did anybody else in this household, but it is fair to say that nobody seemed to care.

And soon Mr. Gladstone would be coming to stay; Granny feared Elizabeth Bruce, the head housemaid, might be vexed. Zellie was actually at Glen when he paid a visit to Sir Charles. It was an historic event in the annals of Peeblesshire. People in the hill-ringed valley came from far and near to see him plant one tree in a park below the house, and fell another. Tree-felling was a favourite pastime with him, and, he said, the finest exercise in the world. He demonstrated his skill at the task. A forester began the work on a forty-year-old spruce, then the old statesman with his coat off, but tied round his waist by the sleeves to preserve his loins against lumbago, he explained, got down to his work with a will. As he swung the axe lustily, the clean strokes sent the white wedges of wood flying. Spectators picked

them up to keep them as souvenirs, writing the date and the occasion on their surface.

Another autumn brought the Master of Balliol to Glen. He was, as Mrs. Hamilton had told Zelle, the friend and admirer of Miss Margot. When he was taken to see the collection of stuffed animals and birds made by her brother Edward¹ on his journeys, Charles Lister, aged five, was his guide. "Mind the bear, Mr. Jowett," said Charles, steering him carefully past a stuffed grizzly who stood by the door. The Master pretended to give it a wide berth. Perhaps it was the Thirty-Nine Articles which would have made him shy, genuinely. It had been such a rush all the autumn, there was scarcely time to sheet the beds before the new arrivals poured in. "What did that signify to Margot?" Granny asked Zellie (signify was one of the words she used); "she is such a *tête de linotte*." Granny had been brought up in France, and often resorted to a French idiom.

One day Miss Margot showed her bedroom to Zellie, who could do nothing but exclaim "*Wunderbar!*" at all the exhibits: the sporting prints, the long row of hunting-whips, the silk nighties made in the racing colours of one of her admirers, the bookcases full of volumes which Zellie had never read and never would read. Some of them had Latin titles, but could Miss Margot read Latin (she could believe anything of her)? *Sartor Resartus*, *Virginibus Puerisque*, *Ecce Homo*. One of the

¹ Edward Tennant, eldest son of Sir Charles Tennant, afterwards 1st Lord Glenconner.

turrets in this room had been turned into an oratory, with a *prie-dieu* and a crucifix, and a skull, yes, a human skull, on a table. (The children had better not see that!) It reminded her of something she had heard of Sarah Bernhardt—was it a skull she travelled around with, or her own coffin? Divine Sarah, how far-away she seemed, and Paris too. Would Zellie ever hear those magic tones again, that golden voice?

Miss Margot's skull grinned amiably at her from the alcove. Was it there to recall the brevity of Life? It was a beautiful colour, clouded amber or ancient ivory; so was the piece of Point de Venise lace which covered Margot's Bible. Zellie did not think much about death; it came to the old, of course, and was not a thing to dwell on until one was ready for it, seldom before. It was abstract, and should not be associated with skulls and coffins. In Germany this skull would have been buried cosily in God's-acre, in the *Friedhof* (the Court of Peace). These were prettier names than churchyard.

Zellie passed through the green cemetery of Traquair Kirk every Sunday. Laura Lyttelton's grave was in a corner. She had died in 1886. You could see the shoulders of the hills, strong, supporting, with the benediction of the sun resting on them, as you stood beside it.

Outside the kirk door stood a pewter platter on a decent linen cloth placed to receive the alms of the congregation. The shepherds took their sheep-dogs in with them. They lay motionless beside their masters, their noses resting on their paws, but the children fidgeted

continually in the family pew in the gallery. Zellie liked the minister's black gown, it reminded her of the Lutheran pastor's at home; the long service seemed familiar also.

"We will now sing to the glory of God, the 23rd Psalm, tune Jackson." Oh, the relief of the children when they knew it was the last; how heartily they sang:

"The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want.
He makes me down to lie
In pastures green, he leadeth me
The quiet waters by."

Tommy and Barbara watched the collies: they too knew that worship was ending.

Zellie enjoyed the drive they occasionally went to the "far shepherd," and associated it with the words of this Psalm. The road up the glen revealed to her the beauty of Ettrick, and the stone cottage (a "but and ben"), snug and storm-proof, looked like a grouse lying on her nest, in a sea of heather. Mrs. Dalgleish came out to talk to the children. Both she and her husband wore on their countenances that expression which is given only to those whose eyes rest perpetually on hills. Zellie felt *she* was the children's shepherd, deputising here below for that Other whose praises they sang in Traquair Church.

They made expeditions less far afield to visit Mrs. Brown the hen-wife, who lived on a grassy mound surrounded by her feathered flock. The turkeys made hideous grimaces and gobbled alarmingly, and the geese, led by the gander, adopted a menacing attitude till they

got past them on to a sheep-track along the hillside which the children named the Fairies' Walk. The emerald rings on the grass, they were credibly informed, were made by the dancing feet of the "wee folk." Sometimes they came home another way, through plantations of young fir and spruce. Zellie called them Christmas-trees. The children had never seen a real Christmas-tree till she made one for them, and all at Glen stood round to sing:

*"Ihr Kinderlein kommet,
Ach kommet doch all
Zur Krippe von Jesu
In Bethlehems Stall."*

Zellie's bedroom was next door to the schoolroom. After supper, when she went to bed, she tried to find parallels in these new people with those who had belonged to her previous life.

There was no opposite number to Miss Margot, obviously, but in Granny Tennant she caught echoes of the complaints of her own mother, and a glimpse of Mrs. Hamilton. She supposed all mothers were alike.

Sir Charles Tennant had a spice of her father's crossness; he frowned like the Finanzrath over the top of his spectacles, and he dozed in the library between tea and dinner, with his slipper hanging on to the ball of his foot, and his knees crossed. He, like her own father, was intolerant of disturbance, but the Finanzrath was never subjected to it; in Germany a man is master in his own house.

If Zellie had married her cousin Richard, she would never have allowed one crumpled rose-leaf to disturb his slumber, not a bruised petal in the marriage-bed. These thoughts made her blush. It was more comfortable to have this good spring mattress to herself, after all, and Richard had found someone to share his. His wife had got two children for him to admonish. Zellie had a boy and a girl too, who belonged to her in the very nicest way. She was responsible for their happiness, and was all-sufficient for the task.

CHAPTER THREE

"C'est une petite pluie qui mouille."

MADAME DE SÉVIGNÉ

IT DID NOT LOOK as if the Ribblesdales would ever have more than a pigeon pair, Tommy and Barbara, but in 1887 Charles Lister was born in the Tennants' house, and appropriately named after his grandfather.

Tommy had just gone to school for his first term, and Barbara's desolation was so great at losing her playmate that it was decided she should winter abroad with her grandmother Ribblesdale. Zellie, who was singularly lacking in the pioneer spirit, resented the loss of the hallowed ground of her schoolroom, although three months at the Mena House Hotel outside Cairo offered certain compensations; she was an absolute truffle-dog for finding these.

At Mena, Barbara was far too much with grown-up

people; she disappeared into the desert on an Arab pony called Pasha with one or other of the young 17th Lancer officers who were stationed in Cairo, and it was always doubtful whether she would be home in time for lessons. Lord Ribblesdale was staying for a while with his mother and his sisters, Barbara's aunts: so was his youngest brother, Reginald Lister. The desert was gold and dazzling; the Arabs, in black and white or in scarab-blue linen, drove white donkeys, tourist-ridden, all day along the sky-line. Granny sat and watched the sunsets behind the fringe of palm trees and talked sadly of Gordon, who must have seen these same fire-laden skies fade before his eyes as they closed in death. Granny had never forgiven Mr. Gladstone for Gordon's betrayal. Some said he had been at the theatre, enjoying a play, when the news of his assassination reached the Government. It was, she felt, the ugliest of the many crimes the Liberals had committed.

"Who killed Charles Gordon?"

"I," said the Nation,

"With my vacillation

I killed Charles Gordon."

"Who saw him die?"

Only his enemy,

None other stood by

To see him die.

"Who made his shroud?"

Gallant and bold,

Soldier too proud,

He needed no shroud.

DEAR YOUTH

“Who dug his grave?”
Only the slave,
He died him to save—
He dug his grave.

These rhymes were some of the bitter doggerel that appeared after his death.

Granny found inspiration and solace in gazing at the Sphinx; that countenance of cosmic wisdom restored her spirit. Impassive, omniscient, the eyes seemed to meet hers and pass on something of their steadfast stoicism, and she enjoyed dwelling on the huge canvas of Egyptian history, heard the echo of the Pharaohs' whips, suffered in spirit the bondage of the Children of Israel, rejoiced with them at their arrival in the Promised Land. To her all this seemed much more real than the sprinkle of cosmopolitan society which had congregated in this tiny corner of the land of Egypt. The dancing, the polo, the gymkhanas were incomprehensible, dream-concepts superimposed on its ancient hieroglyphs.

When the khamsin began to blow, and the hot dust-laden breath made her realise that it was time to turn homewards, the migratory birds had also heard the voice of European spring calling. They followed the swallows and woodcocks and quails, but broke the journey in Italy and lingered at Sorrento on their way back to England, so that England should be really clement when they reached it. A film of emerald green was spread over Italy when they got to Naples. How good to see that green again, and to find as much blue above one's

head as below one's feet. Sorrento was a jewel set in sapphires.

Barbara's parents had been yachting with Lord and Lady Pembroke¹ around that coast, and when the *Black Pearl* put in at Naples Barbara's mother came to claim her. Lord Pembroke excited Zellie's admiration; he was a handsome giant with a dark gypsy head, and a red knitted fisherman's cap on it. He sailed his cutter round the bay flecked with other white sails.

Goodbye then, for Zellie, to the rocky terraces of the Mediterranean coast, to the olive-groves carpeted with iris, to the rugged outline of Capri rising from the bosom of the sea. It had been a somewhat disjointed, confused winter, and left behind it memories of chills contracted at sundown, of Bedouin fleas, of tins of Nestlé's milk, and sores on the backs of donkeys and horses.

There had been few contacts with interesting people this year. Lord Dufferin's² unexpected arrival at Sorrento had been the only one which had left a mark. He had lunched with Granny, and the little girl had been led aside by the veteran diplomat and ex-Viceroy. Under the orange trees in the Hotel garden he had spoken to her of Granny's wonderful beauty in the days when he had first known her in Rome, the year she had married.

¹ Lord Pembroke, 13th Earl. Born 1850; died 1895.

² Marquess of Dufferin and Ava, 1st Marquess. Born 1826; died 1902. Governor-General of Canada, 1872-8; Ambassador to Russia, 1879; Viceroy of India, 1884; Ambassador in Paris, 1892-6.

She was the "reigning toast" in the Eternal City. Neither Zellie nor Barbara quite knew what a toast meant. After the fine gentleman had left, Barbara told her grandmother what he had said. Granny was already flushed, and her eyes were shining. She explained to the child the high posts he had held.

"Will Uncle Regy be an Ambassador some day?" the child asked.

"I hope so," said Granny, for her youngest son was giving brilliant promise everywhere he was *en poste*.

Granny's mind travelled back to the time Lord Dufferin had spoken of. Had she really been so beautiful then? She looked into her mirror. More than thirty years had passed since those days, but though she would have refused to admit it, that flawless beauty was still hers: the classic brow, the straight nose, the wide orbit of the grey-green luminous eyes which no tears could ever dim.

When they got back to London, 18 Manchester Square was ready for them. Sir Charles Tennant had given this narrow-fronted corner house to his daughter. There was a nursery and a schoolroom now, and baby Charles was ensconced in the nursery with dear nurse Roddy. Agnes Berry had come to minister to both these departments. Zellie had at last come into her own, her very own schoolroom, which she had always coveted. She was no longer a nomad camping in the houses of Barbara's relations. In the London schoolroom she could harbour her Larousse dictionary, with the sure and cer-

tain hope that nothing could dislodge it. The Revival of Learning had dawned.

From the green-silk drawing-room below on dinner-party nights the sound of animated voices floated up to her. The friends of Lord and Lady Ribblesdale were talking, talking. What about? she wondered. Sometimes she heard these folk designated as "the Souls." Who were the Souls? When she visited Mrs. Hamilton it was one of the questions she was asked. South Kensington wanted to know and Zelle was quite unable to answer. She only knew the names of the people who came and went at 18 Manchester Square.

Mr. Godfrey Webb, with the cunning brown eye and "*extra sec*" wit, writer of ingenious verse; Mr. Alfred Lyttelton and his tall, breezy, intellectually arrogant brothers; Sir Alfred Lyall,¹ poet and thinker; Mr. George Curzon, invigorating and tremendous; Mr. Asquith, a young Member of Parliament with beautiful prematurely grey hair falling across a brow of power; Mr. St. John Brodrick,² another promising young politician; Mr. Harry Cust,³ intoxicatingly gay and scholarly. These

¹ Sir Alfred Lyall. Born 1835; died 1911. Bengal Civil Service, 1855. Author of *Verses Written in India*; *Life of Lord Dufferin*; *Asiatic Studies*. Lt.-Governor of North-West. Provinces, 1882-7; Member of the Council of India.

² St. John Brodrick. Born 1856. 1st Earl, 9th Viscount Midleton. Entered Parliament, 1880. Secretary of State for War, 1900-1903; Secretary of State for India, 1903-5.

³ Harry Cust. Born 1861; died 1917. Entered Parliament, 1900. Editor *Pall Mall Gazette*, 1892, for four years. Heir to the Barony of Brownlow.

were some of the masculine Souls. The lady Souls were Miss Margot of course, Mrs. Horner,¹ Lady Elcho,² Lady Manners,³ Mrs. Henry White, whose husband was Secretary at the U.S.A. Embassy, and many, many others.

Zellie's sister Louise was governess to Mrs. White's daughter, Muriel, who was industrious as heart of governess could wish. Poor little Barbara Lister had none of her New England zest for culture, and Zellie was often mortified by the American child's superior acquisitiveness.

The little row of Zellie's diaries grew apace. 1890, 1891, 1892, 1893—the last volumes were concerned with Charles as well as Barbara. "Charles is a wonder-child. He learns without being taught. He never forgets anything, he knows Barbara's lessons as well as his own"—a prodigy aged five.

In August 1892 she wrote: "Mr. Gladstone has become Prime Minister again. What will Mrs. Hamilton say? He is eighty-three years old. Lord Ribblesdale is to be Master of the Buckhounds."

The birth of two more babies, girls this time, was registered in her laconic entries: Laura, named after that other Laura, Alfred Lyttelton's wife, spirit of fire and

¹ Now Lady Horner. Fourth daughter of William Graham, M.P.

² Lady Elcho. Now Countess of Wemyss. Daughter of the late Hon. Percy Wyndham.

³ Lady Manners. Constance, daughter of late Colonel Fane, M.P., of Clovelly, Devon, married Lord Manners of Avon Tyrrell, Christchurch.

dew who had died at the birth of her child, and Diana, so called to commemorate the Buckhounds.

The years were passing swiftly, in retrospect they seemed as nothing. How quickly the sparks fly upwards! Often, seated in her schoolroom surrounded with the *cabiers* and drawing-books of the children, Zelle passed them in review, for really there is seldom time to take count of the changes they bring. The milestones are quickly overgrown by tares and moss and wild flowers, so that their inscriptions are obliterated. Nine years now since she had left Harrington Road. It was a large stage upon which she had been called to play super, crowded with actors whose parts were cast for the great world drama which was being played beyond. Which did she prefer—contact with folks whose names were making history, or with the others, the unknown? Then she realised that these, the obscure, mere grains of sand though they were, were still part and parcel of those geological convulsions, those upheavals and subsidences of strata which alter the world's structure. The face of the earth was changing, but it had done so always. It was not this man or that woman who was responsible for the chaotic movements, they were not accomplished by the pressure of the individual, but by the mass; it was not the rocks which were shifting, but the particles of matter. Frau Finanzrath, Count Melchior, Mrs. Hamilton, Cousin Richard, Zelle herself, were just as potent factors as Mr. Gladstone, Emperor William, and Queen Victoria.

Some of the Souls at luncheon one day inspired her

with a more impudent thought (she blushed as it came into her mind). The lady Souls were only a reincarnation of *Les Précieuses Ridicules*. The tide rose, and retreated in time to rise again; actually there was little erosion of the beach. If Canute had been a philosopher like Zellie he would have remained seated in his chair, and would at worst only have got his feet wet. Lord Ribblesdale had said to her, "*Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose,*" and she had replied, "*Une ritournelle.*" But nevertheless something must be stirring to cause this flux, this ebb and flow. "*Ach was!*" she exclaimed, irritated, hesitant. People were never satisfied. The poor wanted money, the rich wanted more, the unknown wanted recognition, the Irish wanted Home Rule. She was sick to death of the Home Rule question; it obscured all other issues. *Weltpolitik* was ignored, and yet strange things were happening on the Continent.

She had no personal desires, or at least very few, but she wanted lots of nice things to happen for those she loved. Good school reports for Tommy, who was now at Eton; success for Lord Ribblesdale in his new appointment; happiness for the children's mother; a sound knowledge of French and German syntax for Barbara—and later, a good husband. She herself would have liked to understand the perplexing problems which appeared in the arithmetic book, but she always had to look up the answers at the back. Neither she nor Barbara could fathom the mysteries of decimals and vulgar fractions. Never mind, girls did not need arithmetic, and girls

would always be girls, although they now rode bicycles and some few smoked cigarettes. Women did not bring much grist for grinding to the mills of God.

It was delightful to think that Lord Ribblesdale was again in possession of a Court appointment. Queen Victoria had always been fond of him, and the Prince of Wales was said to call him "The Ancestor." Perhaps in this new era there would be no more "Ancestors" in England—no more distinguished and *vornehm* men. They would pass away as the "ci-devants" had done during the French Revolution. Then she comforted herself with the thought that "aristocracy" means "the best." Her master at the Stuttgart High School had told her it was a Greek word which meant this. The best would always come to the top, rise above the mass, to elevate and adorn.

Zellie loved beauty, in landscape, in literature, in art, and in individuals.

Nothing could have looked more beautiful than the Ascot race-course on that fine morning when Lord Ribblesdale—the Ancestor—headed the Royal procession in his dark-green coat, bearing a gold-embroidered belt from which dangled the gold hound-couples (dating from the time of Good Queen Anne), his bright chestnut horse, Curious, under him, and the azure distance of the Heath his background.

Zellie saw it all from the private stand of the Master of the Buckhounds next to the Royal box, in which sat the Prince and Princess of Wales. Not far away, in that

fairy-tale castle of Windsor—you could almost see the grey bulk of the Round Tower from the race-course—sat old Queen Victoria, whose servant was Lord Ribblesdale; she was the ruler of the destinies of these countless thousands who thronged it. Zellie did not understand nor believe in constitutional government. The Queen was a great landmark, but when the weeds and grasses of later years overgrew it, and the order changed, other stones would take its place. The road stretched endlessly. . . .

CHAPTER FOUR

"Ce que Dieu garde est bien gardé."

MADAME DE SÉVIGNÉ: in a letter
to Madame de Grignan

IT WAS FROM Englemere House at Ascot that Lord Ribblesdale, mounted on his conspicuous chestnut horse Curious, had ridden out that fine morning to give the race-goers this unforgettable spectacle. It was at Englemere that Zellie lived with them during the years that he held office as Master of Her Majesty's Buckhounds. It was a house entirely to her taste; sun-swept lawns on which huge clusters of rhododendron and azalea flamed, a long white Regency house surrounded by a verandah, and beyond the gardens were resin-scented pine woods.

The neighbourhood to Eton was another source of pleasure. Tommy came occasionally on Saturday afternoons, and one of the hunt-servants' horses from the Cumberland Lodge stables was brought over so that he

might enjoy a ride with his father through Swinley woods. Barbara had a pony called Christabel, a good hunter with a mysterious opal eye. The cavalcade *à trois* set forth as they had done, in less number but as joyful in spirit, as at Easton Grey. Charles had reached the Madame Naslin stage; the Rosetta Stone was in his hand. He was an apt pupil. The two babies, Laura and Diana, crisp white muslin bundles, were propelled in dignified perambulators along shady garden paths. Maréchal Niel roses filled with their fragrance the library where Lord Ribblesdale struggled with conscientious industry to disentangle the sheep who had just claims to enter the Royal enclosure on the Ascot race-course, from the goats to whom, with much courtesy, he had to refuse admission. So few sheep in those days could find room in it, so many goats applied for vouchers. He told Zellie that when in the mountains of letters which each post brought him he found a tradesman's bill, it was a welcome diversion from the monotony of his mail. But when the great race week was over, there was a great deal to make Ascot delightful for everybody.

The Saturday-to-Monday parties at Englemere for instance: it was, Lord Ribblesdale said, only vulgar journalese to talk about "week-end parties"; this and "house-parties" were expressions he abhorred. Nevertheless a paper called *Modern Society* recorded them. It was occasionally and surreptitiously bought by Zellie, when she was travelling or when she succeeded in finding a copy of it at the local newsagent's. Her susceptibilities were

less easily outraged. The first thing she did with this print was to remove its blatant blotting-paper-pink cover. It looked more respectable stripped to the buff. *Modern Society* was a treasury of the kind of social gossip which, alas, in these years is the daily bread of many. In it Zellie found the names of quite a lot of people who came to stay at Englemere.

The schoolroomites had up to this date been strictly segregated; those who wished to find Barbara and Zellie had to seek them in an upper chamber, but now they spent the time between tea and dinner in company with the guests. Nobody enjoyed these hours better than Zellie. She had particular favourites amongst the grown-ups. Zellie naturally took to some of these interesting people more than others. She was absorbed in their personalities, a quick appreciative audience to their conversation. Mr. R. B. Haldane was serene and sympathetic and always very courteous to her. One of the children had said, "He is like the man in the moon," and she agreed with this simile.

His wide bland face diffused a mild radiance, his unexpectedly weak voice surprised her. She was pleased to hear that he had been at a German university, and paid a yearly pilgrimage to Weimar to visit the shrine of Goethe. There was a silvery quality about his mind which matched the children's metaphor. She was on easy terms with him, and his knowledge of the subtleties of her own language led her to rejoice in his advent. But Harry Cust was the most favoured. Brilliant though inaccurate linguist,

he made her dizzy with his torrent of French and German talk, interlarded with quotations from their literature. He pressed his suit with her, affectionate, cynical, rapturous and erudite, he swept her off her feet. His conversation was a waltz set to an intoxicating tempo; she felt as breathless as she had when Cousin Richard had swung her round the Leopold Saal, as near to laughter, or tears, or both. He would quote Heine to her, and talk of love and youth, whilst the scent of meadow-sweet drifted on the evening air through the wide-open windows, till the rich imagery of those lyrics, the thought of spring and adolescence, made her eyelashes wet—or was it just hay-fever?

"*Du bolde, du reine, du feine, du meine,*" he would murmur as with rippling laughter he placed his arm willy-nilly round her black petersham waist-belt.

"*Oh, ce Monsieur Cust!*" she would exclaim, disengaging herself, "*il est impayable.*"

Actually it was Mr. William Waldorf Astor¹ who was paying him at this time, and quite a handsome salary too, as editor of his evening paper the *Pall Mall Gazette*. W. E. Henley was writing for it, and many other men of letters, friends of Cust. Henley's lyrical gift reminded Zellie of Heine; he too sang of "the green delicious plenitude of June," and June was with them here at Englemere. It seemed all wrong that during this month of months tidings of death should reach one of

¹ William Waldorf Astor. Born 1848; died 1919. Raised to the Peerage, 1916. Became proprietor of *Pall Mall Gazette*, 1893.

those who were rejoicing in it. Frau Finanzrath wrote that Julie had died—Julie her right hand, the one daughter she had kept near her always, whom she could never forgo. It was the first time that the cold hand of Death had touched Zelle's garment, pulled and torn off the cloak which Julie would have wrapped round her so tenderly to keep her warm and protected from the world's rough winds.

Zellie walked down Ascot High Street, and bought five yards of black *voile* patterned with a small white trefoil, to make her mourning—it was all that she could find in the village shop, but kind Mrs. Hamilton (who had known Julie) sent her two lengths of inky black material from the Army & Navy to supplement her wardrobe. She wrote her a beautiful letter beginning, "Meine liebe Sophie." She was still Sophie to her, and to those tear-tarnished faces in the Ludwigstrasse, which she now yearned to see. She decided to go home to them in her holiday. Her father had recently become Oberfinanzrath, a *Beamter* full of years and honour, shortly to retire and enjoy his well-earned pension. He had mellowed in the autumn of his life. After Julie's death he began to fail; the long strain of this faithful service had tired him; he lapsed into a gentle twilit senility from which the old-time crossness had faded. The pendulum-foot in the embroidered mule now indicated contentment before it slowed down for sleep, and ultimately death.

Lady Ribblesdale became aware in 1895 how extremely

one-sided Barbara's education had so far been. She knew nothing of English literature (Mr. Asquith had given her a copy of *Sesame and Lilies*, and though she liked the title she had never been able to read the book), nothing of mathematics, little of history, and had never heard of political economy. The only outside educational influence which had been brought to bear on her was Monsieur Henri Roche.

The classes Monsieur Roche gave in London were as exciting as a race-meeting to Zellie. They took place one a week in a dingy room in the neighbourhood of Portman Square. All the young ladies belonging to noble West-End houses were led there by their governesses. The *cours* was conducted in French by this charming bearded and erudite professor. He had followed in his father's footsteps, for Granny Ribblesdale as a girl had attended classes given by the elder Roche.

Monsieur Roche's curriculum was a wide one. It embraced History — ancient and modern — Grammar, Literature, Mythology, Mathematics, and the use of the Globes.

The pupils were accommodated at a long table. At the end of each lesson questions connected with the subject were asked with disconcerting suddenness. Anyone might answer; it was a catch-as-catch-can affair.

"*Qui sait?*" his interrogatory began—and whoever knew the reply snapped it out instanter before the other students could collect their scattered wits. "*Qui sait l'année de la mort de Racine?*" or "*Qui sait le chef-lieu du*

département de l'Indre?" *Qui sait?*—Who knows?—and to each scholar who had the good fortune to reply correctly a *jeton* (poker-chip) was thrown as a reward. The counters were placed in a wooden money-box in front of every seat. At the end of the lesson the chips were counted, and the fortunate individual who had collected most was awarded a *présidence*, a card on which her name was inscribed. At the end of term these *présidences* were counted up, and she who held the greatest number received a super-*présidence*, which declared her to be first in her class.

The competition was terrific. Alas, poor Barbara! The governesses were as eager as trainers waiting for the tapes to go up. A young Jewess was the Mumtaz Mahal in these Maiden Stakes. The chips accumulated alarmingly in her money-box. Mademoiselle Gruber always, or nearly always, short-headed Mademoiselle "Listère." It was mortifying for Zellie, who could never acquire the indulgent optimism which characterises the trainer of race-horses.

There were rounds of jack-pots which preceded the *Qui s'ait?* when the questions were directed to each in turn, not nearly so nerve-racking, tests of stamina rather than of speed. Here was a chance for the slow-witted, the plodders; but success was less glamorous.

Monsieur Henri Roche meant a great deal to Zellie. In her eyes he was a man of culture rare, an encyclopædia of knowledge. In appearance he reminded her of another Henri—of Henri Quatre. His well-trimmed

beard, his quick dark eye, his gallant bearing, recalled the Basque monarch. Zellie associated him with that King who had bartered his faith for a throne ("*Paris vaut bien une messe*"); what price would he have set upon a *présidence*? Zellie would gladly have sold her soul for one for Barbara—and Barbara often disappointed. Her lack of form lowered Zellie in Monsieur Roche's eyes; when Barbara "flattered" she felt that he looked at her more tenderly. Barbara was a *gage d'amour* between them.

Some other young ladies were equally unpromising. The Wilson girls,¹ daughters of Mrs. Charles Wilson (afterwards Lady Nunburnholme), were a sight for sore eyes; they looked as if they had stepped from the canvases of Gainsborough or Sir Joshua, but when the *Qui saits?* pelted down on their lovely heads they were as mute as they were beautiful.

One of Lord Ribblesdale's frequent visitors at this time was the pale-faced, intellectual Mr. Asquith. He came to Englemere several times, and was extremely cordial in his relations with the schoolroom party. Genuinely interested in young people, he had great charm for them. He was soon able to gauge the abyss of Barbara's ignorance, "deeper than plummet sounded." "Reflect, young person," he would say to her, half in fun, half serious, "reflect before you speak." Sometimes he would put posers to her against which Monsieur Roche's were child's-play. Possibly he may have com-

¹ Afterwards Countess of Chesterfield, and Viscountess Chaplin, daughters of 1st Baron Nunburnholme.

plained of Barbara's ineptitude to her mother; be that as it may, the impression grew that her education was entirely lop-sided. Her ignorance of English was truly deplorable; she had no Latin. Was it too late to remedy these things?

When Zellie's thoughts turned to mundane matters, she was surprised at the fact that Miss Margot, despite her brilliance, her wealth, and her position, was still unmarried. She certainly did not lack suitors; Zellie had heard so many names connected with hers. Mrs. Hamilton had gone so far as to murmur Lord Rosebery's.¹ The list of *soupirants* seemed inexhaustible. Zellie began to fear that though she never would or could be an old maid, she might remain a bachelor. When the news came that she was engaged to Mr. H. H. Asquith, now Home Secretary, and generally regarded as future Prime Minister, she was enchanted.

The wedding was to take place at St. Margaret's, Westminster, and Barbara would be bridesmaid. It was the era of large sleeves, full, puffed, soufflé-like sleeves. Miss Margot's trousseau "featured" these. Accordion pleating was also in fashion, especially for those ladies who, like her, indulged in what was called skirt-dancing. The whole affair was enjoyable in the extreme for Zellie, who wrote to Stuttgart that she had never witnessed such a grand assembly or seen so many distinguished personages.

¹ 5th Earl of Rosebery.

After having had Mr. Gladstone and Mr. Balfour pointed out to her, she became more interested in English politics, and made fresh efforts to understand the Home Rule conundrum. It was all very confusing, for when she had first arrived in England there were only Liberals and Conservatives, but later she heard people talking of Unionists. Who and what were these? No wonder the Liberals were so worried they could not carry on. Mr. Asquith was out of office before you could say Jack Robinson, or more aptly, Lord Salisbury, for it was he who now became Prime Minister. Zellie was grieved, for with the change of Government Lord Ribblesdale lost the Mastership of the Royal Buckhounds.

Maybe the light words spoken by Mr. Asquith—who had returned to his work at the Bar—had sown their seed in Lady Ribblesdale's mind. Barbara, aged fifteen, had lacunae in her education which must be filled. Monsieur Henri Roche and Zellie were unequal to the task. Margot Asquith's young step-children were ripe for the schoolroom; it was proposed that Zellie should be lent to them for a period. Meanwhile a youthful Girton lady was engaged to fill the gaps in Barbara's scanty stock of knowledge. Miss Worthington would teach her, it was hoped, the outlines of Philosophy, Economics, and Modern History. The latter was extremely necessary, for though Barbara knew all about Pépin le Bref, the Valois kings, Barbarossa, and Simon de Montfort, she would have been incapable of answering a single *Qui*

sait? about Lord Aberdeen, Cavour, or Mr. Joseph Chamberlain.

The thought of separating Barbara from Zellie was not a pleasant one, for these two had grown into each other's lives. The news that they were to be parted was broken to Barbara a few days before her Confirmation. Zellie listened to the Bishop's prayer as he petitioned that "the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and ghostly strength, the spirit of knowledge and true godliness" might descend on these white-robed children. How eagerly she desired these graces for her "*Barbara chérie*." To leave her was an agony to Zelle, though she knew she was going to the Asquiths, who would love and appreciate her. Each day, as it flew past, swift as a leaf in the wind, she wrote in her diary, "*Triste, bien triste*," "*Mon cœur se brise*," "*Je pleure toujours*," and the turn of each page, the passage of each day, brought her nearer to finality.

Barbara, rebellious and irreconcilable, made no effort to adjust herself to circumstances. She hated poor Miss Worthington, hated to be told to say "ideel" and "reel" (the Cambridge accent, no doubt), hated to have her feeble compositions called "papers," closed her mind stubbornly to Adam Smith, and turned with loathing from Justin McCarthy's history. Alone (in her bedroom) she sat with the *Gesangbuch* Zellie had given her for her Confirmation on her lap. She read Luther's fine hymns. Zellie's favourite was *Eine feste Burg ist unser Gott*. But what a wonderful fortress Zellie had built for her in all

these years—the stones were love! Inside its strong walls Zellie had hung some of the tapestries of French and German literature. On the gold and silver platters of the banqueting hall, she hoped this wayward child might some day taste the fruits of the “spirit of wisdom and understanding.” It was a magnificent *Burg*; no enemy arrow could pierce the defences, cannon-ball or blunderbuss shatter them, whilst Zellie kept watch.

She grew resigned to the separation, bitter as it was. The old philosophy of the Ludwigstrasse home supported her: “a little folding of the hands to sleep.” Life had been kind to her so far, it would be kind again. Adjustment, acceptance. The Hamilton girls had fought and struggled all in vain, for now Jean was married, and Maud and Alison too. They had their own *Burghs* filled with children, and Barbara would have hers, in time. Only Zellie would have no castle she could call her own; but she did not mind, she was not a person for castles. She would build them for others, that was enough for her—and for them.

CHAPTER FIVE

"Ce Tout-le-Monde qui a plus d'esprit que
Voltaire, et plus de poésie que Virgile."

J. CLARETIE

ZELLIE—SHE HAD NOT CHANGED her name after her departure from Lady Ribblesdale as she had done when she left Mrs. Hamilton—revelled in the exceptional quality of the young minds she was now instructing. Violet¹ and Cyril Asquith had memories impressionable as wax, solid reasoning power, facility for expression and unlimited industry. It was a treat for her to teach such gifted children, who desired information and held the door wide open for it to blow in. The pain of being parted from Barbara (who, unregenerate as far as Miss Worthington was concerned, had been sent to Paris for a further educational experiment) was lessened by her pleasure in such pupils.

¹ Violet Asquith, daughter of the Earl of Oxford and Asquith. Married, 1915, Sir Maurice Bonham-Carter, K.C.B.

During 1896 and 1897 Zellie's diaries made cheerful reading. Eighteen hundred and ninety-eight would be an exciting year, as during its London season Barbara came out. Zelle now understood the phrase which had puzzled her so greatly when Mrs. Hamilton first used it. She was able to share the joys of balls and parties, for though they were not living under the same roof, she came round to 40 Grosvenor Square (Grandpapa Tennant's house) to see Barbara dressed for the Drawing-Room. The Ribblesdales were living there whilst their new house in Green Street was being built. It seemed wonderful that this schoolroom child had already grown into a *débutante* in a white tulle dress from Paquin, pailleté with silver, nodding feathers in her hair, a veil, and a train trimmed with white hyacinths. Zellie watched her and her mother drive off to Buckingham Palace in the snug dark-blue brougham in which Sir Charles drove each morning to the City.

Barbara's mother gave a tea-party on their return, and many ladies came to it in their tails and veils. Barbara had the disappointment of not seeing dear Queen Victoria; she had only remained in the Throne-Room long enough for the *entrée* to file past her; she was too frail to endure the fatigues of the whole afternoon. So Barbara made her curtsy to the Prince and Princess of Wales and the Duke and Duchess of York.

Zellie was in a whirl during the tea-party. How strange to see such a blaze of diamonds in the glare of daylight and so many trains spread out in the long yellow gallery.

Zellie picked her way carefully among them, and pricked up her ears to find out who all these fine-feathered birds were. Mrs. Willie Grenfell¹ was one; she had heard it said that this beautiful young lady bore a marked resemblance to Lady Crosbie in Sir Joshua Reynolds' portrait. Lady Crosbie was smiling down at them from the walls of this very room, in shimmering white draperies against a woodland background of birch trees and luminous blue-grey sky. One of those many lovely eighteenth-century English women painted by Romney, Gainsborough, Reynolds, and Hoppner, turbaned and pearl-hung, wandering in their floating muslins through enchanted landscapes, whose portraits adorned this house. Here beside them were women of nineteenth-century England—in evening dress though it was only five o'clock, and the sun of early summer, filtered through the plane trees of Grosvenor Square, shone on their bare arms and necks, and lit their jewelled head-dresses. The spectacle delighted Zellie; she saw that the lovely English type persisted. In the spacious days of the Georges, so in Queen Victoria's; veils and trains and feathers brought these ladies nearer together, that was all. Beauty and lace, and pearls and satin pertained to English skies, to the Court of St. James's and the England of St. George. How much in life here was still static, despite the flux, how much hallowed and permanent.

Nevertheless some had to fall before Time's sickle.

¹ Mrs. Willie Grenfell, daughter of Hon. Julian Fane, married 1st Baron Desborough, K.G.

Mr. Gladstone had been struck down, and Bismarck too. The young trees would soon grow and spread and take the place of the stag-headed oaks which 1898 had felled.

Bismarck was an irreparable loss, the master-builder of the German Empire. When his influence was removed what might not its young Emperor do? He had already annoyed his grandmother on several occasions. Queen Victoria had rebuked him for his aggressive utterances and his thinly concealed Anglophobia. This year he had gone to Palestine and entered Jerusalem riding on an ass—that was too much. No one should be deliberately provocative; there was enough to exacerbate strained relations here below without trailing one's coat.

The English could not feel very comfortable about what was happening abroad, but they too had got some hot-heads, as evidenced by Dr. Jameson's raid in 1896. President Krüger had demanded £1,600,000 for damages. A lot of grumbling was still going on in the Transvaal. But the South African cloud had not marred the radiance of the dear Queen's Diamond Jubilee. Diamonds came from South Africa, Zellie knew, but that was no reason for trying to grab them from the poor Boers.

The season which followed might prove a little flat after the glamorous one of 1897. Zellie wished she could have seen more of it—the Naval Review at Spit-head, for instance. A large fleet was necessary to guard the British Empire; the English had to pay for it through

heavy taxation during their life, and by worse taxation after death (Sir William Harcourt had invented death-duties; he was a friend and relative of Lord Ribblesdale). But their Army could not cost them much, it was so small, an instalment of an Army, a bagatelle. If ever there were trouble abroad—in the Transvaal for instance—where, Zellie wondered, would they go to find their soldiers? Of course William II knew this, or he would not have been so aggressive to his grandmother.

Though the grandson was truculent and impetuous, he had come across the sea to her when the sixtieth year of her glorious reign was commemorated. In his white uniform he had ridden side by side with his uncle, Albert Edward Prince of Wales, in that long procession which wound through London on its way to St. Paul's to give thanks to God for His blessings. Zellie thought that William, glittering as he was, must have felt a pang at his heart when he remembered that his own empire, fashioned by the Iron Chancellor, boasted no territories oversea. Just an insignificant strip or two of Africa, an island or so somewhere, nothing to dignify by the name of Colony. But Zellie knew that envy was an ugly thing which seldom got you anywhere, and, fascinated as she was by the fine ladies after the Drawing-Room, *she* would not have been in their shoes, not for anything.

But she would have loved to see Barbara at the dances to which she went during this season. The happiest life, Zellie thought, was schoolroom life—children's blue eyes, England's blue waters. She hoped that Barbara

would find plenty of nice rich suitors whilst she waltzed around Mayfair ballrooms. She wanted her to marry quickly in order to have babies; they would be—practically—Zellie's grand-babies, and in a very short space of time she would be able to place the tattered fragments of the first French reading-book before them (she wished it had been graven on stone, for it was disintegrating fast after all these years).

She frequently sat with Barbara whilst she was dressing before a party, preening and prinking in front of her mirror, and she questioned her about her partners. No answer suggested that a Prince Charming was in the offing. It made Zellie quite nervous. Could it be that the poor girl might live and die a spinster? Suppose her rivals at Monsieur Roche's class forestalled her; suppose instead of *présidences* they won the *partis*! There was nothing Zellie could do to help matters; she could not prime Barbara with allurements as she had crammed her with French grammar. She could only sit and wait in the bedroom on the third floor where she was putting on her ball dress. Though Worth had made this one, Zellie did not think it any prettier than the pink tarlatan she had worn herself in the Leopold Saal, twelve metres of material in the skirt enhanced by a dress-improver. Still, she did not consider her *débutante* would disgrace her as she flew down the immensely long winding staircase to join her mother.

Lady Ribblesdale found that balls every night were very exhausting. She did not spend a minute on the chaperons'

bench, she was as much in request as her daughter. Girls indeed, were an incident only at balls in those days. It was the young married women who were the big-game hunters; they carried all before them, and often it was the girls who were the wallflowers. Sometimes Barbara's father volunteered to shoulder the burden of chaperonage, in order to give her mother a rest. In the small hours, when asked by some drooping chaperon, "How is your girl going to get home?" he would answer frequently, whilst making for the door: "Oh, half-a-crown and a latchkey, I suppose." Already the emancipation of young women was in the air. Some of the nicest girls, though Mrs. Hamilton would not have credited it, were doing unbelievable things. It was rumoured that one or two had been known to sit out a dance in a stationary four-wheeler, or drive round Hyde Park with their partner in a hansom, so Lord Ribblesdale's suggestion was not so outrageous as it seemed.

Tommy Lister, now in the 10th Hussars, was stationed at Canterbury. He and his brother officers occasionally came up to London for a few days' gaiety. Tommy was full of forebodings as to what the outcome of the trouble in South Africa would be. The small cloud that had been no bigger than a man's hand was assuming alarming proportions, but the Season continued despite threatening skies, and Barbara enjoyed it to the full. After London came visits in Scotland, and later the winter at Gisburne. Dancing, hunting, playing with the baby sisters and brother Charles when he was home for the

DEAR YOUTH

Christmas holidays. Always at the back of Barbara's mind, as of Zellie's, lay the hope that they would be reunited; and indeed the following year Zellie returned to the Ribblesdales to teach the younger Lister children.

CHAPTER SIX

*"When did hearts so careless beat?
When was grief so far?
Lovers' meetings are not more sweet
Than warriors' partings are!
For love is a child in the days of peace
But a man in the days of war."*

ZELLIE REMEMBERED quite a lot of things connected with war—rolling bandages, making *charpie* (before the days of gauze dressings), knitting scarves. Better still, she remembered reports of continual advances in 1870; the surrender of fortresses, the encirclement of towns and armies, and the public rejoicings which celebrated final victory.

She was twenty years old when the Peace of Alsace was signed. War was truly terrible, but it was triumphant. Württemberg had been far removed from the actual conflict, but though France was fighting against Prussia, Swabians were assisting Prussians, and Stuttgart participated in the peace jubulations. But Zellie did not like war although it led to victory, so she felt as much dismay

as surprise when she heard that England was going to be involved in a campaign against South Africa. It really seemed unnecessary, and her heart failed her when she thought of Tommy Lister going out with his regiment to fight the Boers. No doubt he would be needed, for poor England possessed a very small army, but it would cause his dear parents and Barbara grave anxiety, and she herself was much worried at the thought of all the dangers to which he would be exposed.

She was reassured by everyone—it was going to be a short war, hardly worthy of the name; an expedition merely, brief and glorious, which would be over in three months, and the chances were that Tommy would be home by Christmas to sing *O Tannenbaum*, joining hands with her as she had first taught him to do, when he was seven years old. But Zellie still remained anxious; South African wars had always proved obdurate. She vaguely remembered Mrs. Hamilton having told her about Majuba; perhaps Mr. Gladstone had blundered, for the Grand Old Man had *la main malheureuse* where punitive expeditions were concerned.

Tommy Lister was keen to go, and disappointed when for various reasons other regiments embarked before his own. He was afraid that when he got to Cape Town he would be too late to see a shot fired. He seemed very young to be anywhere where bullets were flying about, not yet of age; but it would have been impossible to hold him back from this adventure, even if he had not been a soldier by profession. Lots of young men felt the same

urge, and older ones too. The meagre little British Army was swelling into quite a respectable-sized one, through the patriotism of volunteers and Colonial corps. That was what war always did to a country, however un-Chauvinist. Strains of fife and drum, marching feet to the tune of "The girl I left behind me," and folks went mad, said and did the most extraordinary things, changed from peace-loving citizens into blood-thirsty jingoes, and whilst the newspapers made fortunes the nations paid the bill. This was not likely to be a heavy one. The Boers were only Dutch farmers, who could not do the goose-step; and indeed if they had been drilled and trained for it, it was doubtful, judging by the contour map of the Transvaal which Zellie studied, whether they could have executed that march up and down this hilly country, where kopjes had to be stormed apparently by frontal attacks, the strategy employed by all English generals. Cavalry of course would be invaluable in a rolling country, and mounted infantry (Zellie had not heard of this arm before; it sounded hermaphroditic).

Tommy was seen off at Liverpool by his parents. His regiment suffered shipwreck off St. Helena's Bay owing to the unseaworthiness of the transport—part of the "muddling through" technique for which British administration is so justly famous—but no lives were lost, and though nearly all the chargers were drowned, Tommy was able to swim one of his to shore.

A few months later England was taking a very different view of the campaign. Hearts were heavy with de-

spondency and apprehension, but Tommy was forging ahead with the cavalry to the relief of Kimberley.

What comforted Zellie was that she had come back to Gisburne to live with the Lister children. She could share Tommy's letters—addressed in pencil, in flimsy envelopes, unstamped, with "On Active Service" written in the corner. They filled all hearts with pride and thankfulness. He was doing so well out there, covering himself with glory, earning and deserving promotion and distinction, and in between the passages which described the activities of his "flying" squadron came little sentences of gratitude for trifling gifts received from home—knitted gloves and ties from Zellie, acid-drops and chocolates from the little sisters, books and hankies from Granny and the aunts—messages to all, gentle and simple, who belonged to him and to Gisburne.

But why couldn't the war stop? Why was he still sleeping on that veldt under skies powdered with stars? Why did those Dutch farmers continue to defend their homes so bitterly against the British troops who, history tells us, have never been defeated?

After the first year England settled down to the war, seemed indeed to forget that any ante-bellum status had ever existed. "There's nowt like a long slow war to benefit t'farmer," one of Lord Ribblesdale's tenants had said to him; but the old gardener, scratching his head over his hives, had murmured, "Bees is doin' badly . . . war doan't seem to end." Neither did the casualty lists; they showed how much of England's youth and valour

was being spilled on those sandy slopes. Typhoid swept the hospitals. No wonder that the Queen, like Rachel of old, refused to be comforted.

Lord Roberts returned in January 1901 to assure England that the war had ended; but it was not the war which had ended, it was the great and glorious Victorian era, for the dear Queen, worn out by faithful service to her State, by personal sorrows, and by the griefs of her subjects, died just a few days after he had made his triumphal return to her city. Love and war are for the young. They demand the resilience of youth, and its optimism for the future.

The fighting went on, although Queen Victoria had passed away and Bobs had come back to tell her people that British arms had once more been victorious; but it was not an acute malady any longer, it had developed into a chronic condition. Oom Paul had trekked away from his stoep to find sanctuary in Europe, and the funny papers declared that he was proposing to visit the Paris Exhibition with as much bullion as he could pack into his suit-cases. The French had been extremely disagreeable to the English about the war. Reginald Lister, Barbara's uncle, who was First Secretary at the Embassy in Paris, resented their attitude.

Although the Kaiser had outraged public opinion in England after the Jameson Raid by the telegram he had sent to President Krüger, when he heard of his grandmother's grave illness such deliberate unfriendliness as he had shown England during this period was forgotten,

and somewhat officiously he hurried instantly to Osborne to attend her death-bed. A few days later, riding beside King Edward VII, he followed the gun-carriage which bore the Queen-Empress to her last resting-place. Death is the Great Reconciler, but had she known the future would she have admonished her turbulent grandson again, as she had done in 1896 in her memorable letter?

Tommy was enjoying the last phase of the war: the freedom of a nomad's life spent under the canopy of heaven, the long days in the saddle, the nights beside camp-fires, God's caravanserais shared with his loved brother officers, Bill Bentinck,¹ Eddie Cadogan,² Tom Brand,³ Harry Wilson.⁴ But the Last Post had sounded for two others, Captain Meeking and Major Harvey. Tommy had been awarded the D.S.O., had been wounded slightly, but throughout the campaign, except for the few days in hospital after he had been hit, he had never been sick or sorry. Sorry, yes, to be cut off for so long from home and family. As he could not come home to them, Lord and Lady Ribblesdale decided to go to

¹ Lord William Bentinck, half-brother of the present Duke of Portland.

² Hon. Edward Cadogan, son of 5th Earl. Born 1879; killed in action 1914. Major 10th Hussars. Served in S. Africa and in Great War.

³ Now 3rd Viscount Hampden. Born 1869. Served as Brigademajor to 2nd Cavalry Brigade, S. African War, 1899-1901 (despatches, brevet), and as a Brigade Commander (despatches eight times, Legion of Honour) in Great War.

⁴ Harry Wilson. Now Sir Mathew Wilson, Bt., C.S.I., D.S.O.

him; and in 1901, whilst this strange, dragging conflict was continuing, metamorphosed into a sort of hide-and-seek spiced with danger, they arrived in Cape Town, to be met by their son, bronzed and broadened, grown in wisdom and stature.

President Krüger got to Paris, and so did Barbara. In the joys and excitements connected with the Exhibition and the fun it provided, South Africa seemed remote and unreal. Regy Lister and Maurice Baring, both *en poste* there, provided splendid entertainment for her and for Zellie, who came too.

The moving platform which carried spectators round the Champ de Mars was an excruciating ordeal for the latter. *Hasenfuss* more than ever, she cowered like a hare in its form while the instrument of torture whirled her round and round the Exhibition area. Though upheld on either side by two stalwart diplomats, she still dared not move from it. As on an escalator, the passenger had to step off while the *trottoir roulant* continued to revolve; but this was asking too much of her—Maurice's and Barbara's and Regy's combined entreaties would not induce her to budge. Nobody knew how she was persuaded eventually to descend.

Zellie had never been happier than at this period. She had the best of both worlds, with Laura and Diana Lister as her toys, her dolls (this was the name given to them by everybody); *kinderlieb* as she was, small children were a necessity to her, and at the same time she was able to share Barbara's life and her love-affairs, for

suitors had come to her "Barbara *chérie*," and gifts of flowers and letters, which had to be opened mysteriously, with only Zellie as witness.

"Do you call that a *love* letter?" she, who had never received one, would ask, incredulous.

"Well, yes, perhaps it is."

"But then, has he asked you to marry him?"

"No, not in so many words."

"Tell me, *chérie*, what do men say when they propose?"

Barbara was often forced into an awkward corner; her suitors did not do much proposing, many of them were in no position to offer honourable marriage—philanderers, detrimentals, but ardent nevertheless. It was comforting for Zellie to know that there appeared a reasonable chance of Barbara not turning into an old maid—a *vieille fille*, *eine alte Jungfer*.

More than ever Zellie belonged to the Ribblesdale family, for her own had dwindled. Herr Oberfinanzrath had died some years before, and his wife had not long survived him. The Ludwigstrasse apartment had passed into alien hands, her sisters were scattered far and wide; her brother Gustav's house was the only little corner she could call home in Germany. Here she was made welcome whenever she wished to return to her fatherland, but the fear of travel discouraged her from joining them frequently. She had never outgrown her childish terror. The memory of that first journey from Stuttgart to Paris remained green. She felt secure only when she was sur-

rounded by those she loved here. This was her stronghold, her *feste Burg*.

In May 1902 the war ended. It had been expected to last less than six months and had dragged through three years. The articles of peace were signed at Pretoria in May. The villagers of Gisburne marched up to the Hall doors with torches to cheer the parents of the soldier son who would now come back to the home destined for his inheritance. He had been detailed to return to England at once with a contingent of his regiment in order to represent it at the Coronation of King Edward. His selection was due no doubt to his continuous war service and good performance. On July 7th he was home at Gisburne. Flags, wreaths, arches, adorned the road he travelled. Standing on the threshold of the house, he addressed the villagers and tenant farmers and their wives and children who had assembled to do him honour.

He told them that since he had left them he had heard many strange languages and seen much new country, but he had heard no language which pleased him so well as the clear, wholesome, north-country English of their own Craven, and no land was so dear to him as the uplands and the lowlands, the roads and the fields and the fences of the West Riding of Yorkshire.

Zellië was one of the little group standing around him. Was this, she pondered, the child who had held the huge conch-shell to his ear to listen to the voice of the ocean? Had it told him perchance that he must be prepared, if

needed, to die for the flag? If so, he had not forgotten its message.

If ever the Nation had to fight again, he continued, and he again had the honour and good fortune to fight for it, he would remember this day, this July day with the sunshine playing on the long lime-avenue ahead of him, and on the reaches of the river Ribble behind. He hoped that the peace which would follow would prove a prosperous and glorious one.

There was another kind of peace, the peace which passeth all understanding, and for a time it too seemed to have descended on those who were standing beside Tommy—the Happy Warrior.

What could be done to reward him for the stress and strain of the past months, the many hardships and the griefs he had endured? Lord Ribblesdale arranged to give him his heart's desire—a long, splendid hunting season in high Leicestershire, with plenty of the best horses he could collect for him. They would share these, for to father and son nothing here below was so ecstatic as the music of hounds when they break covert, and the landscape of Paradise cannot be more beautiful than green pastures and naked woods at such a moment, with the wind in one's face and the shoulders of a free horse under one.

"Little Tommy" was over six-foot-two, but he was still the boy who had called out to Lord Worcester from the back of his twelve-hand pony, "Come on, sir, I'll

make a hole for you," when they faced a forbiddingly blind fence together. Zellie was a little shy of him, all the same, when she kissed him. He had to stoop down a long way for her to do so.

The piping times of peace had apparently come to stay. She was so glad for his dear parents' sake and for Barbara's. He had grown older and more serious, a thinker, a talker, a reader—some day he would be a leader.

He discussed political and social changes over the coffee-cups and showed strong Conservative leanings (oh dear!); he declared himself an Imperialist *sans phrase*. His mother could read in the stars that eventually politics, not soldiering, would be his career, and she rejoiced secretly, for she wanted to keep him safe—her first-born. But his opinions were still too chaotic for him to wish to enrol himself under any banner. He must wait till they crystallised. At present he had no intention of leaving the Army. He loved his regiment, and when his leave ended he would rejoin it in India, whither it had gone from South Africa.

He had yet to celebrate his coming of age, for his twenty-first birthday had been spent on the veldt. He was twenty-four when the rejoicings connected with his majority were celebrated at Gisburne. There seemed to be continual rejoicings that year, for though the Coronation had had to be postponed till August owing to the sudden illness of the King, it had been delayed only a couple of months. King Edward and his beautiful Queen

Alexandra were crowned; the South African War was over; Tommy was home unscathed, invested with the Distinguished Service Order with dear Queen Victoria's initials on it. God was in his Heaven and all seemed right, or very nearly right, with the world.

Zellie had passed her fiftieth birthday, but for her the toll was light. She appeared to be dowered with eternal youth, no older, no sadder, no more sophisticated than she had been when she first left Germany. What was there to age or darken her spirit? Many of those she loved had left her for another country—Mrs. Hamilton and many of her own people and some of those amongst whom she dwelt—but she made no distinction now between *meum* and *tuum*. Our people were her people, whither we went she went. All could not travel together, so a few, the old and the tired ones, had joined the Company of Heaven.

She had as her constant companions the most cherished of the band, most cherished because of their youth: Tommy and Barbara, and Charles and Laura and Diana. Hardly less dear were Lord and Lady Ribblesdale, the children's grandmother, their aunts, and the faithful retainers of their childhood, Roddy and Agnes. The Christmas-tree united many of these at Gisburne. It shone bright, and smelt very sweet as the candles set fire to the fir needles and little puffs of resin-scented smoke rose as incense to the New Year.

Peace, peace. She felt *she* understood its rich meaning.

CHAPTER SEVEN

“Very sweet are the uses of prosperity, the harvests of peace and progress, the fostering sunshine of health and happiness and length of days in the land. But there be things . . . ‘the good of’ which and ‘the use of’ which are beyond all calculation of worldly goods and earthly uses—Things such as Love and Honour, and the Soul of Man, which cannot be bought with a price, and which do not die with death.”

MRS. EWING

AFTER SHE GREW UP Barbara had formed quite a number of friendships of her own choosing. Her mother would have liked her to consort with a lot of people who were not especially congenial to her, but in these matters a mother cannot dictate. In fact Zellie realised that parents as dictators had gone out of fashion since the good old Hamilton days. Even then the conflict had begun, the war between parents and children: it promised to be as long, as dragging, and quite as futile as the South African one.

Barbara, her mother felt, was rather tiresome in preferring always to associate with people older than herself. Lady Ribblesdale would have liked her to foregather with the daughters of her own friends, some of them the late

pupils of Monsieur Henri Roche, well-turned-out débutantes for whom life spelt a round of balls, country-house parties, and Sundays on the river. She was, however, commended for her genuine affection for very old people, those whose heads appear circled with that nimbus of white light with which old age crowns them. Monsieur Bocher in Paris, beloved octogenarian, was one of these, and his sister-in-law Madame Odier.

Amongst her contemporaries were lovely Pamela Plowden,¹ her cousin Nan Tennant, and that singing-bird, instinct with grace and charm, Viola Tree. Many of the young married friends of her mother were also hers, Lady Poynder² and Lady Westmorland.³

Society, with a big S, had enlarged its frontiers. Political opinions no longer presented barriers; a temperate zone existed where those with fiercely opposite convictions fraternised in the evening having spent their afternoons in both Houses vilipending each other's credos. The same bland influences neutralised all distinctions of birth. It was no-man's-land, or rather everyman's.

The Asquiths entertained a great deal in their house in Cavendish Square. The staircase had been painted by Thornhill (Hogarth's father-in-law); magnificent Georgian mantelpieces and dignified mahogany doors

¹ Pamela Plowden. Now Countess of Lytton.

² Lady Poynder. Now Lady Islington.

³ Countess of Westmorland. Lady Sybil St. Clair Erskine, daughter of 4th Earl of Rosslyn, wife of 13th Earl of Westmorland. Died 1910.

adorned its finely proportioned rooms. Sir Charles Tennant's daughter had inherited his exquisite taste and skill in arrangement.

The London house of Barbara's parents had been destroyed by fire in 1895; their new one in Green Street had been designed by Mr. Sidney Smith, the architect of the then recently erected Tate Gallery. Infinite pains had been bestowed on its every detail. It had a pleasant Georgian façade. The drawing-room, long and low, had five windows with good thick white sashes which looked full south. Tommy came back from South Africa to find his parents living here; his grandmother had a house in the same street.

But what are town houses? Camps only, pitched for a few years in one street or another, whose dwellers move out of them leaving no trace of their occupation. After their departure signs of their taste—good or bad—are usually obliterated by those who take possession. London houses bear no permanent trace of their one-time owners; no pang is felt in abandoning them, for the town-dweller is a lightly rooted plant whose fibres run along earth's surface. The storms of circumstance disturb him easily, but when transplanted he will thrive again; when uprooted he leaves no tendrils behind him.

Houses fascinated Zellie. She had a romantic attachment for many. They were the frames which held the portraits of her dear ones in her long gallery of memory. Whenever she thought of a particular house, her first impression was the one which she retained.

Of all the places she had lived in with the Lister family Easton Grey was the best-loved. Gisburne was their own, but that was in the North of England, and the North cannot smile as Wiltshire does. Spring and summer there seemed the only seasons; winter and autumn were short-termed visitors, and even so winter often masqueraded in spring's dress. Flowers were in bloom directly the year had turned the corner; green-ruffed aconites appeared as samples of yellow sent to Aunt Lucy by the *Bon Dieu*, to show what the gold of crocus, daffodil, cowslip, and buttercup would be later. Sarah Ann's sun-bonnet, the shade of cuckoo-flowers, was a perennial.

The rest of Sarah Ann's toilette consisted largely of Zellie's cast-off wardrobe. Old black skirts, turned olive green by long wear, became protective colouring when she hunted for "nesties," or for white violets along the Fosse-way.

Lord Ribblesdale always moved his horses from Yorkshire to Easton Grey after the New Year. It was easier for him to hunt with the Duke of Beaufort; (his work in London was more accessible from Wiltshire). He loved Easton Grey and his hosts there. His brother-in-law, Graham Smith, was like himself, an old Harrovian—an exemplary squire, good classical scholar, and to use a phrase which through misuse has worn threadbare and meaningless, a great gentleman. His manner had a grace which was one with the loveliness of English landscape; his very greeting was a benediction. He no longer rode to

hounds at this time, but the return of those who did, at the end of the day, was welcomed with a "Where did you leave them, dear?" as he rose from the deep chintz chair where he had been dozing over his newspaper, or refreshing his memory from a little well-thumbed Horace. They would live the hunt over again.

Old jokes die hard—many that he enjoyed with Lord Ribblesdale were sacrosanct for their association with the past.

How well the amenities of country-house life were understood here, imbued with that subtle quality which no modern house can offer! The right chair in the right position, the ample writing-tables, the hospitable Sheraton and Chippendale chests and cupboards of the bedrooms with their lavender-scented drawers, the fine old silver on the dining-table; everywhere the delicate evidence of breeding, care, and thought.

The nurseries had sheltered all the Lister children, and whilst they lived here they had learned much from their uncle and aunt, as children learn, consciously and unconsciously. It would have given them pain to vex Aunt Lucy or to run counter to any of Uncle Graham's wishes. If he had a favourite amongst the nephews and nieces it was Tommy, the young Hussar; he himself had been in the 7th. The fact that the boy rode so straight and gave promise of being a good soldier, filled him with joy. Maybe he was just a little bit disappointed that Tommy's first hunting-season after his active service was to be spent in Leicestershire, but he would not have said so for

the world. It was only natural that his nephew should want a taste of the Shires.

At the end of February 1903 Tommy had to say good-bye to England. After six months' leave it was hard to turn his back on the life at home, hard too for his parents and Barbara to realise that he was going overseas again. His father told him of the joys that awaited him in India—polo and pig-sticking, inexpensive luxury, the glamour of the East which he himself had felt deeply when he was soldiering at Umballa with the Rifle Brigade.

But Tommy reached the Bombay Presidency just as the hot weather was beginning, and peace soldiering after the freedom of a campaigning life was another story. His letters home breathed depression, discontent, and restlessness. If, he wrote, you intend to make soldiering your profession, you must keep your sword unsheathed, and at "the carry." He saw trouble brewing in Somaliland and had written to the War Office offering his services should any officers be sent there from the Indian establishment. At that time this seemed outside the bounds of possibility, but the Secretary of State for War, Mr. St. John Brodrick, one morning during a hack-ride in Rotten Row, told his father he had arranged for Tommy to be seconded from his regiment. He added that it would be a splendid chance for a boy who had already given proof in South Africa of exceptional quality.

The choice was a good one. Tommy, though not twenty-five years of age, was put in sole charge of the

Remount Department in Somaliland. The Somaliland expedition, small as it had promised to be, grew apace owing to the difficulty of subduing the Mullah and his followers.

Often the arduous character of the work and the loneliness of his billet discouraged him; he yearned to leave the base and to get to the advanced line where fighting was anticipated. But it was not till early January 1904 that he succeeded in doing this. On the 11th a battle was fought at Jidballi, and Tommy, who volunteered after the engagement to carry despatches between the two British columns, was reported missing. On the 14th came the certainty of his death.

It had been the custom at Gisburne to organise an amateur play during the Christmas holidays. The children and their cousins and friends collected every year for its performance: a happy fortnight of rehearsals and outdoor fun, hunting and rough-shooting. The house was overflowing with gay and talented young folk. Lord Ribblesdale was in London when the first intimation of the disaster reached him. The guests at Gisburne dispersed; he remained in town to be near the War Office, trusting that the next day would bring reassuring news, but after twenty-four hours of anguished uncertainty another telegram came confirming the worst fears. He returned to Gisburne immediately.

The death of their eldest son was borne with magnificent courage by the young soldier's parents. There seemed no place for bitterness, only for grief, in the loss

of one "who being made perfect in a short time fulfilled a long time." But sorrow is hard to bear.

Tommy had been the close companion of Barbara, almost to the exclusion of others of her own age. She felt his death had changed for her "the aspect of the earth and the imagery of Heaven." During the months which followed she wished to be alone with her grief. Zellie did not count; she was part of herself, part of the radiant Past, and part of Tommy too. There was no need to talk of him to her, for Zellie's thoughts, too, brooded continually on remembrance. She, like Barbara, treasured all his possessions, those trifles of his everyday life almost too precious to be handled. His hunting-whips, his spurs (how early he had won them!), his books and clothes. His room next to Barbara's became a reliquary to contain them. Zellie had always kept the childish shells in the schoolroom.

The Park at Gisburne spoke eloquently of him, the river, the stables. The winter trees, stripped and mournful, sung his dirge as they lifted their leafless branches to the skies. Yet his parents never faltered in their high-hearted courage, and forgot their own grief in thoughtfulness for others.

Letters of sympathy poured in to Lord Ribblesdale from all those who loved father and son. The crossing-sweeper in Grosvenor Square, the hatter in St. James's Street, the bootmaker who made his hunting-boots. The simpler the scribe the more moving the tribute. A hard-riding man in Leicestershire, no ready writer, sent these

words, "The dear boy was so fond of hunting." Henry James, the novelist, said to his mother, "You are suffering the sharp pains of the mothers of heroes." Comfort was found in seeing those who had lived in close association with him, more especially any of his brother officers home on leave.

Harry Wilson spent that summer in England, and at Easton Grey he asked Barbara to marry him. To leave her parents at that moment would have been impossible, they were too stricken; a year at least must elapse before she could do so. Later perhaps, but not now, whilst the road was all behind her and the track ahead seemed uncertain.

Zellie read to her endlessly during the long quiet evenings, for Zellie's reading had a quality of its own for Barbara, possibly because from her earliest days she had grown accustomed to this voice, to which Tommy, too, had listened in sickness and in health. She had definite theories on reading *à haute voix*. There is healing in it, there is rest. If the listener is too weary, mentally and physically, to concentrate, the flow of words acts as a lullaby; if the mind is receptive the book will lift the veil and open other vistas.

The "dolls," Laura and Diana, were balm in that sad household; they wandered through the dark days, lovely and refreshing.

The last entry in Zellie's diary of this year contains the following passage: "*Une année bien triste. Qu'est-ce que la nouvelle année va apporter? Perdrai-je ma Barbara chérie?*" But

DEAR YOUTH

even if she lost this older child, the younger ones would take her place; there was only one which could never be filled—Tommy's.

Later, years later, someone writing of the death of another young soldier in another war said, "Broken hearts like broken ranks must be closed in war-time." That was what, at Gisburne, all were endeavouring to do.

CHAPTER EIGHT

"It sufficeth me to live in truth principally, not in feeling."

MASTER HYLTON, *Of the Song of Angels*

IN AUGUST 1905 Harry Wilson came home for his wedding. Zellie's half longed-for, half dreaded dream was to be fulfilled. Like all our wishes which are close on their realisation, this particular one was chequered with shadow and sunlight. Once Barbara was married she would be separated by thousands of miles from those she loved, and who loved her. She would have to leave them all to go out to India with him, and this thought clutched at Zellie's heart and slowed down its joyous beat.

But the wedding itself, the purchase of the trousseau, the shower of presents, the choice of bridesmaids and their dresses—all these things were intoxicatingly delightful. The thought of Barbara, a white satin bride in St. George's, Hanover Square, and after that a married

woman with a husband and a wedding-ring, seemed too good to be true. She had chosen a friend of Tommy's, a brother officer of his, who was also a neighbour in Yorkshire and a friend and ally of Zellie. The cup of school-room happiness was full and running over.

She came pattering into the room, and with near-sighted eyes, and with little stifled interjections, examined each fresh object connected with the wedding, felt everything, turned it over, exclaimed at each. She tried Barbara's wide-brimmed hats on her own head, where they practically extinguished her, fingered the new *lingerie* when it arrived from Paris, drove everybody crazy, and was incapable of rendering the slightest service asked of her at that busy time, and yet she was so happy that all was forgiven her. Miss Margot Tennant's wedding, which she had not forgotten, had meant for her only the service at St. Margaret's and the reception afterwards, where all the notabilities were pointed out to her; but this was a long protracted enjoyment spread over several weeks, during which she often forgot what her loneliness would be after the honeymoon couple had driven away.

Laura and Diana too were pleased about the wedding. It would be fun for them to have a married sister, and Harry was dearly loved already. He was ultra-violet light personified, and the champion purveyor of larks.

There once was a Derry-Down-Derry
Who loved to see little folks merry:

that was Harry Wilson—"Scatters." Barbara's mother

was devoted to him, but the cherished hope that she would marry a politician had died hard.

Although Lady Ribblesdale herself was the wife of a soldier and the mother of one, she had deep down an unacknowledged contempt for the Army. Soldiers were generally speaking stupid people, only needed in time of war; when there was no fighting they were laid on a shelf where they grew obsolete and dust-covered. Soldiers took little or no interest in politics, though this was perhaps fortunate, for they were Conservative to a man; that was another black mark against them. They looked splendid as she had seen them in 1901 in South Africa in their khaki uniforms, with the veldt their background, but that was not enough. To have a fondness for the Army *per se* was just a German foible. The "Brodrick" cap which they now wore in place of the neatly folding forage cap set jauntily on the side of the cranium, was aping another German fashion. The Secretary of State for War, whom Zellie remembered as one of the "Souls," had made himself as unpopular at its inception as if the Head Master of Eton had substituted bowlers for top-hats.

Yet Barbara's mother had feelings of affection and admiration for all the young men she knew personally who had chosen the Army for their profession. She looked upon them as comrades in arms of her eldest boy, though she never doubted that, had he lived, he would have devoted his energies to wider interests. On balance she regretted the fact that her son-in-law was in a cavalry regiment, but it was fortunate that her daughter had

found such a good kind husband who was universally adored.

Zellie had genuinely dreaded the possibility of her not finding one at all. She might have withered on her stem into spinsterhood. The announcement of fashionable alliances which figured daily in the *Morning Post* had often caused her stabs of envy. She could not see the point of any girl not marrying, for what else was there for a woman to do? You married not for husbands but for nurseries. If you could not get these through marriage, you had to obtain them in some other way; there *were* others, some quite respectable. Have children you must. Zellie had managed to, and she looked down on all women who could not.

It is rather sad when a fledged bird leaves the nest, for it looks ugly and battered after the bird has flown, its wondrous symmetry destroyed, cold, and empty, a formless thing of mud, twigs, and faded moss. But such a nest means only farewell to spring. The nearer the end the nearer the beginning.

Upstairs, directly after Barbara's wedding, the packing-cases, the heaps of straw and paper, the confusion of trunks (some of them already labelled CABIN): downstairs the pyramids of gold chairs stacked high, the red baize trestles, reminded Zellie of those abandoned nests she had been shown in Easton Grey hedgerows by Sarah Ann.

"That's one of last year's," Sarah would say, letting back the parted branches; "that's no use, but I expect

we'll find one of this year's close beside it." She was always right.

It was the same with lessons, thought Zellie; no sooner a child—one of her children—could read *Les Malheurs de Sophie* with the diction and accent of a *boulevardier*, than another was practising the plain chant of "*Je vois un garçon—un cheval*" as it is written in the Book of Naslin.

Often during that summer she thought of Tommy—her "eldest." He had come through the South African campaign to be killed in a little tin-pot war, in a country and for a country which was not worth a hair of his loved head. When he got home from the Transvaal the likelihood of his serving in another campaign seemed so remote as to be ridiculous. England was a peace-loving country, not given to wars. When the British fought it was against the grain, for some far-fetched ideal, to aid the under-dog, or right some often imaginary wrong. In Queen Victoria's reign there had been relatively few wars, far-away ones anyway into which the British had been dragged reluctantly; for Napoleon was right, they were essentially a peace-loving people—a nation of grocers. But it was unfortunate that the English were so fond of pointing a moral; their attitude when they unwillingly imposed punishment on another country was that of the schoolmaster who, before administering a caning, says, "This is going to hurt me more than it hurts you." They went to war as men go hunting, hoping they are going to be well carried, and that they may get off with the leading hound.

As individuals they were brave and self-reliant, they had a good eye for country, and did not object to roughing it. They usually "muddled through." Lord Salisbury had used this expression when things were going badly in South Africa, and he had also said during the Black Week that the War Office would have to advertise "Wanted—a timid General."

Zellie felt convinced that war on a grand scale, as her Great Frederick had understood it, would never fall to their lot; Britain did not like or need soldiers, but sailors. Island folk have to have ships. King Alfred was thinking about that when he allowed those cakes to burn. She could not understand why Germany was spending so much money on a Navy. The Kaiser was mad about the Kiel Canal; he had also taken a fancy for Heligoland, and Lord Salisbury had "traded it" (as the Americans say) for Zanzibar, Witu, and part of Somaliland. He had, however, been sympathetic on the whole to her countrymen and did not, at first, view with any suspicion the Emperor's desire to add a box of sailors to the box of toy soldiers dear to the heart of every German boy.

The Germans did a lot to the crumbling rock of Heligoland. They reinforced it with ferro-concrete walls fifty feet wide, which sank one hundred and fifty feet below sea-level. It made an excellent base for submarines, adjacent as it is to the Kiel Canal.

Lord Ribblesdale told Zellie that in these days international finance was too closely interwoven to permit of war between Great Powers. But then, Zellie reasoned to

herself, there were always the Jews; some said in Germany that they were dangerous factors in world economics. The French had been dreadfully worried over the Dreyfus case and England had been indignant against the miscarriage of justice. Why not leave France to settle her own kosher hash? She—a governess—protested against this British governing of the Universe. The Germans did not treat England to their views on the vexed problem of Home Rule, though the English were at it still, hammer and tongs, and had been ever since she had come to England. *Kolossal!* Conservatives and Liberals fought about it "bitter and regular like husband and wife."

This simile brought Zellie's thoughts back to marriage. She prayed that Barbara's might prove harmonious.

The matrimonial market was a capricious one. A young woman's shares went up and down for little or no reason. They would slump badly as the result of some trifling indiscretion. Close chaperonage usually kept the stock high, but paradoxically quite a number of young ladies who smoked cigarettes, went out shopping alone, or travelled without a maid, succeeded in leading to the altar the scion of a rich and noble house. *Partis* were shy birds, it behoved mothers of daughters to put salt on their tails: (Lady Cork, whose wit and brilliance old age could not dim, had told Lady Ribblesdale that when *her* girls were about to make the acquaintance of one, she pretended for as long as she was able that this particular youth was ineligible).

When Barbara left Grosvenor Square in a shower of rice, Zellie threw a satin slipper after Sir Charles Tennant's brougham; then with a few tears under her spectacles, she returned to her deserted schoolroom.

After Barbara had been a few months in India Zellie began knitting, furiously. Under her swift and dexterous fingers a fleet of Shetland-wool bootees came into being. She exhibited them proudly. So great was the number that a casual observer might have inferred that the happy event foreshadowed in the Wilson family was the advent of a young and lusty centipede.

The prospective mother came home in the early spring. Her baby was born in July, a boy—with the normal complement of feet.

CHAPTER NINE

"L'extrême Justice est une extrême infamie."

RACINE

REGULARLY BY EACH MAIL, Zellie received Barbara's letters written from Mhow, in the Bombay Presidency. In them she described the flat mud-coloured landscape, bordered by a line of mauve Ghauts. She had expected India to be quite different from this—a tangle of tropical vegetation, quivering with humming-birds. Her bungalow was old and historic, mantled with bougainvillea, but this did not compensate her for its many discomforts. She loved the beauty of the sunsets for those few moments before night falls with no prelude of twilight, suddenly and completely, as if the hand of God had drawn down a blind. In spite of the joy she felt when, at her first appearance at a regimental concert given by her brother Tommy's old squadron, his men

gave her a splendid ovation (it was worth coming to India for such a welcome), in spite of the kindness of the General and his wife and the happiness of her married life, she had a nostalgic longing for England.

Lord Curzon was leaving India as the Wilsons arrived there, to be succeeded by Lord Minto as Viceroy. Barbara had a few hours with Lady Curzon before she sailed. She looked as beautiful as she had done when as Miss Mary Leiter she had stayed at Glen in the old days, and had come every evening to the schoolroom to play with the children. The cooing voice and pure Madonna face were the same. She spoke to Barbara tenderly of Tommy's death.

Zellie was sorry that the East did not agree with the bride's health. In the spring it obliged her to return to England; her husband was to get leave to join her later. But it was delightful to get her home so much earlier than had been expected, and to have her living under her parents' roof again. The feverish knitting of small garments redoubled in its intensity.

A lot of things had happened in the few short months of Barbara's absence. A general election, fought on Tariff Reform, had gone against the Conservative Government. Free Trade was still the fetish, and the people of the United Kingdom remained faithful to it in practice and in principle.

The Liberals were now in office. Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman was Prime Minister, Sir Edward Grey Foreign Secretary, Mr. Haldane was at the War Office,

and dear Mr. Asquith was Chancellor of the Exchequer. Mr. Lloyd George (a new name to Zellie) was President of the Board of Trade. Zellie had dwelt in the ranks of the Liberals so long now that she felt a vested interest in their fortunes. She could chronicle the history of the Party since 1885. As she looked back she remembered their defeat at the polls in that year. The country had been outraged by Mr. Gladstone's muddle in Egypt, and the needless sacrifice of General Gordon's life. Charles Gordon was the soldier chosen by the Government to effect the evacuation of Khartoum, the Cabinet having decided that they would give Egypt no support in holding the Soudan. Before tackling that country—a plague-spot—it was determined that the Khedive should put his own house in order. All troops were to be withdrawn from the Soudan. Perhaps General Gordon was not the man best suited for this task. Be that as it may, in March 1884 he found himself hemmed in by the Mahdi's hordes. In his last telegram before the wires were cut he complained bitterly of the neglect of the British Government. For ten months, however, he had held out with unexampled courage and determination. Lord Wolseley was sent with a relief expedition from England, but valuable time had been wasted in discussion. Meanwhile the Nile was rising.

The starving native garrison, after untold hardships, became disaffected. On January 26th, 1885, yet another attack was launched. It was successful. Gordon was massacred, and his head—the head of the only white man

left in Khartoum—was carried to the Mahdi's camp. The news of his assassination was received, not only in Great Britain and her Colonies, but in all foreign countries, with grief and consternation. The whole world learned that a hero had been allowed to perish. The last entry in his diary read: "I have done the best for the honour of my country. Goodbye." This was true, but what had Mr. Gladstone done to support him in his valiant effort? No wonder the electorate turned against a Government which had failed in its duty to one who had never failed in his.

The constituencies turned the Liberals out in 1886, and they remained out for many years, for there was another black mark against Mr. Gladstone. He had come to terms with Charles Stewart Parnell. This volte-face on the part of their leader broke up the Liberal Party, the veil of the Temple was rent in twain. Khartoum and Home Rule for Ireland were regarded as two betrayals of the country for which Gordon had died. So Lord Salisbury's majority in 1886 was a clear Conservative majority, independent of any other section, and a great many Liberals were Gladstonians no longer. Some went over to the Conservative ranks, and others called themselves Unionists and supported Lord Salisbury. Joseph Chamberlain was among them, and bore the bright new standard of Imperialism. This Government ruled the country till the end of the century, with the exception of those three years when, as Zellie remembered, Mr. Asquith had been Home Secretary, and Lord Ribbles-

dale had held the office of Master of the Buckhounds—the happy years at Englemere House, Ascot, from 1892 to 1895. But the Home Rule albatross was still round the Liberal neck, and it was this ill-fated bird which once more caused their downfall.

After 1895 and the defeat of their Bill, Zellie heard less about Irish affairs. The “distressful country” appeared quiescent; the old disputes, if not dead, were at least anaesthetised.

During the last years of Queen Victoria’s reign Zellie listened with keen interest to talk on world politics, to her very much more interesting. If she had been a man she would have liked to have been a diplomat, and would have made an excellent one. Someone described her as “easy company,” discreet, conciliatory, non-communicative in conversation and correspondence. Mr. Asquith asserted that her letters were as good as Madame de Sévigné’s; adopting the same method, she allowed her pen to “trot along with the reins on its neck.”

What Zellie heard about Germany did not please her at this time. The Emperor was asking for “a place in the sun”—that was only natural. Unfortunately the British had been sun-worshippers for several centuries before his birth. There did not seem to be a beach on which the English had not pegged out a claim for their favourite pastime of sun-bathing. The French had annoyed the Kaiser very much by sending out a mission to Morocco. Things had looked ugly till it was agreed that an International Conference of the Powers should be appointed to

deal with the vexed question. The Algeciras Conference ended the Moroccan crisis, and the Entente Cordiale was as cordial as before it had arisen. At one time it looked as if Germany really meant to attack France before the mediators could get to work. France had been badly frightened, but when King Edward visited Emperor William later in the year, the Kaiser told him that their fears were completely unfounded. France was a bundle of nerves, and they had taken alarm for no reason. So the incident was closed, and the British Secretary of State for War was invited to attend German manœuvres in the autumn.

Nobody knew quite what sort of figure "Schopenhauer" Haldane would cut in the company of the glittering German Headquarters Staff and the foreign military experts, but when he suggested he should attend in frock-coat and top-hat as an "ignorant civilian" doubts (and possible French misgivings) were dispelled. The philosopher was, however, busy in the War Office, and soon he had drafted the outline of his scheme. Zellie saw the soldiers who visited the Ribblesdales hold up their hands in pious horror at the proposals of the black-coated reformer. The standing army was to be reduced—God knew (and Zellie too) it was small enough already—and, Pelion heaped on Ossa, a battalion of Scots Guards was to be disbanded.

The Expeditionary Force was to number 160,000 men ready instantly for mobilisation, with a second-line Army, called "Territorial," behind it.

This Government was certainly a cheese-paring one. It had reduced Naval estimates, the Admiralty had been persuaded to drop one Dreadnought out of the four the Conservatives had agreed to build. Not everyone liked that. Londoners chalked a large 4 on the pavements to record their disapproval. Of course it's nice to have Dreadnoughts, thought Zellie, but not so nice to have to pay for them. Was not Mr. Disraeli's cry, uttered after the Crimean War, echoed in every heart, "Let us terminate this disastrous system of rival expenditure, and mutually agree, without any hypocrisy but in a manner and under circumstances which can admit of no doubt, to show by a reduction of armaments that peace is our policy"? Nevertheless, during the Hague Conference, the German delegates were absent when a pious resolution was unanimously passed that limitation of armaments was "highly desirable."

Zellie often visited Barbara, whose husband had been appointed Instructor at the Royal Military College at Sandhurst. The house at Camberley was a novelty, so was Barbara in her new rôle of *Hausfrau*. It is feared she fell far below German standard, but where a nursery was there was bliss for Zellie, and in 1908 Barbara's contained two babies. Zellie would have preferred to remain in England to play with them, but Lady Ribblesdale wanted her younger daughters to learn music and art during that winter, so she was obliged to accompany them to Munich. In a pension in the Glückstrasse, memories of the educational ventures on the

Continent of dear Mrs. Hamilton came back to her often.

All was so much the same, and yet so different! Nobody seemed to mind if Laura's loveliness attracted the attention of bright-capped students. They followed her through the streets, and little wonder, for she was tall and beautiful; Zellie was a flustered duenna at such times, hustling her home as quickly as she could, but Lady Ribblesdale only laughed when told that one of these had tried to kiss the girls.

Charles Lister came out to spend Christmas in Bavaria. He was doing brilliantly at Oxford, and indeed Charles was the brightest star in Zellie's educational firmament. He had taken a scholarship at Eton from a private school, which justly prided itself on his having done no extra work when preparing for it. He had been runner-up for the Newcastle Scholarship, and had been elected to Pop with no athletic prowess to commend him. He had taken an Exhibition at Balliol, and in 1909 a First in Classical Greats. In the same apparently effortless manner a year and a half after he had come down, he had passed the examination for His Majesty's Diplomatic Service.

Charles enjoyed the holiday weeks at Munich in 1907. The opera, the Leberwurst, the dark brown Löwenbräu, and the convivial evenings in the beer-gardens.

It was another Germany for Zellie than the one of the Ludwigstrasse. Her roots in German soil had perished with the years; other, and stronger ones, were established

in England. She wilted a little at being transplanted so suddenly, but it was only for a time. When May came she was back in her adopted island, close to Barbara and her babies again.

Lady Ribblesdale had suffered from the harsh climate, and the indifferent food of the *pension*; she was far from well on her return. It was the beginning of a cruel illness nobly borne.

CHAPTER TEN

"Patience is worth more than miracles doing."

The Book of Margery Kempe

LAURA LISTER'S FIRST SEASON was in 1910. It had been her mother's fondest wish to recover her health sufficiently to be able to launch this second daughter on the tide of London life. For more than a year she had been making heroic efforts to overcome her illness, never complaining of the isolation of the sanatorium in North Wales, believing always that the doctor she was under, a recognised authority on lung trouble, would succeed in arresting hers. She set herself valiantly to carry out all he prescribed.

For a great many months she lay in bed, resting, reading. Through the wide-open windows the robins flew into her room to perch on the rail of her bed. She knew them individually: one was a rip, a "ruffler," his feathers

bedraggled and damaged through many a duel. She was companioned on her outings, or whilst she lay in a garden shelter, by Jack, a lovely lurcher which she had bought from a gipsy. Jack was a faithful esquire; his high spirits helped to keep up hers. He understood her perfectly. When he jumped on to her bed to look closely into her face with his enquiring amber-coloured eyes he was careful, big dog as he was, to avoid treading on her, and he seemed to know instinctively whether she was well enough that day to play with him, or just too tired to do more than receive his tribute of affection and sympathy. When she was ordered by the doctor to keep silent in order not to strain her throat, he obeyed her every gesture; she did not need to whisper her commands.

Many books were read to her during this time by her devoted nurse, Jean Steele. She preferred biography to fiction. Lockhart's *Life of Scott* and Boswell's *Johnson* were two she never tired of. Everything was subordinated to getting well, but when the summer of 1910 came, she had not recovered sufficiently to justify the interruption of her open-air cure. The bitter disappointment of not bringing Laura out was faced with hopeful courage and resignation. She kept in close touch with everything that concerned her younger daughters; they wrote daily.

It seemed intolerable for those at home to know that she could not be with them that year in the London house. She had planned it for them, and had entertained visions of Laura and Diana dancing in the long green Georgian room, which they would have adorned by their

youth and radiance. No "Season" could be joyous without her, so it was decided the Green Street house should be let, and that the girls and their father should spend the summer in a villa with a large garden which they rented at East Sheen.

Barbara's husband in 1909 had been appointed Military Secretary to the Commander-in-Chief in India, Sir O'Moore Creagh, V.C., who had succeeded Lord Kitchener; she spent the autumns and winters in Calcutta, returning each spring to be with her children, who made their home at Gisburne or with the Easton Grey aunt who was always ready to share its enchantment with the children of others. The Wilsons had no house in England after he received this Staff appointment. In some ways the arrangement worked out well, as Barbara was able during part of the year to help her father in looking after his younger daughters.

The news that Charles had obtained a first in Classical Greats was an immense joy and solace to his mother. He brought his Oxford friends to Gisburne frequently. Memories of the years he was at Balliol filled Zellie's mind with pictures of him with his sisters and Julian¹ and Billy² Grenfell, Patrick Shaw-Stewart,³ Ronald

¹ Hon. Julian Grenfell, eldest son of Lord Desborough. Captain 1st Royal Dragoons. Served in Great War, 1914-15 (despatches, D.S.O.). Born 1888; died May 1915, of wounds received in action.

² Hon. Gerald William, second son of Lord Desborough. Temporary Lieutenant 8th (Service) Batt. Rifle Brigade: killed in action in Flanders, July 1915.

³ Patrick Shaw-Stewart, son of General J. Heron Maxwell Shaw-Stewart. Balliol scholar, 1905; Fellow of All Souls, 1910. Joined

Knox,¹ Edward Horner,² and how many others who had also shared his Eton life.

During the winter or early spring days of 1910 they went coursing on the high land around Wigglesworth, the long dogs streaked across the sad-coloured pastures, whilst the girls, bent like reeds before the north-west wind, watched the lurchers turn their hare or lose him in a hedgerow. There were summer days when they all bathed in that pool of the Ribble which lies below the house, no space to swim more than a few strokes in its cold brown waters, but they idled on its banks, where burdock leaves and wild Canterbury bells grow high. There was hunting with the Pendle Forest hounds, of which Lord Ribblesdale was Joint Master; the Harriers had been converted into Buckhounds. Black Japanese buck had been turned out in the coverts, and afforded long runs across that wild green land in which the little white-faced farm-houses stand solitary. For background

Naval Volunteer Reserve, August 1914. Served with Royal Naval Division in Gallipoli, 1915; Liaison Officer in Salonika, 1916. Served in Hood Battalion in France, 1917. Killed December 1917. Croix de Guerre and Legion of Honour.

¹ Ronald Knox. Born 1888. Educated Eton (1st scholarship), Balliol College, Oxford (1st scholarship). Received into the Church of Rome, 1917. Catholic Chaplain of the University of Oxford. Now Monsignor Knox.

² Edward Horner, eldest son of Sir John Horner of Mells, Somerset. Born 1888. Balliol College, 1906. Called to the Bar, 1910. Joined N. Somerset Yeomanry, 1914; afterwards transferred to 18th Hussars. Wounded in France, 1915; served in Egypt, 1916. Rejoined regiment, September 1917; died of wounds received at Cambrai, November 1917.

they have the long range of the Pennine Hills, blue as harebells, and ethereal as the Delectable Mountains of *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

Wherever Laura and Diana went a band of Charles's friends followed them. Zellie often wondered whether *des jeunes filles* should enjoy the close companionship of *des jeunes gens*. Was it *convenable*, she enquired, this train of young admirers, of adolescent lovers? Such a situation in time past would not have been tolerated, but perhaps some warning reached her that they were privileged to fill the rapturous cup of youth without stint or measure and hold it to their lips. There was none to cry halt—till later.

Years after, she decided that these boys were the ripe grain of an exceptional harvest. Nature had put forth a supernatural effort, destined like the miraculous blossoming of the aloe not to repeat itself till one generation or more had passed away. When all this *jeunesse* met in London, life for them would be more conventional and guarded. There would be dances and parties; Laura would no longer go hatless, wind-blown; the girls' life would be less unfettered. But London when it came changed nothing in these friendships though it provided other pleasures. The loves did not grow cold.

One evening Zellie, watching from an upstairs window, saw Edward Horner following Laura's motor. They had dined together. He ran beside it for a while calling to her, "Laura, pink Laura, don't go!" and she, in a mist of rosy tulle on her way to a ball at Derby House,

kissed both hands to him. He jumped on to the running-board of the car. "Take care! take care!" she called. But the young do not take care; that is not their way.

Another wedding for Zellie when Laura married Lord Lovat.¹ He met her at her first dinner-party, in 10 Downing Street, and married her the same autumn. Diana and Laura had never been parted. Diana wept.

King Edward VII died in May. Zellie had ever felt profound respect for the King. She admired the way he ensued peace zealously; she liked to dwell on photographs of him taken at Marienbad with Homburg hat on head, spreading goodwill on the troubled Continent with every puff of his cigar. His guttural accents made him a little one with her and with her countrymen. She had heard his gurgling chuckle, too, on one occasion when, before his accession, he had lunched at Grosvenor Square to select the pictures which Sir Charles Tennant had consented to loan to the Paris Exhibition of 1899. Zellie had lingered on the staircase whilst, led by his host, he made a survey of the treasures each room contained. On this occasion Barbara's mother had annoyed

¹ Simon Joseph, 16th Baron Lovat, K.T., K.C.M.G., K.C.V.O., C.B., D.S.O. Born 1871; died 1933. First Life Guards, 1894-1897. Served in S. African War, 1900-1902, with Lovat Scouts which he raised (despatches twice (C.B., D.S.O.)). Military member of the Territorial Army Association. Served in the Great War, 1914-1918 (despatches four times, Legion of Honour and Order of the Crown of Belgium). First Chairman of Forestry Commission, 1919-1927; Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Dominions, 1927-8.

the Prince of Wales by discouraging her father from sending certain especially valuable pictures to France, pointing out the risks they would run. But Albert Edward, hearing her whisper to Sir Charles, shook his finger at her and said threateningly, "I fear I shall have to send you to the Tower, Lady Ribblesdale, for this."

King Edward was certainly the friend of France; was he perhaps the enemy of Germany? No, that could not be, for everywhere he went he made friends, instinct himself with the spirit of good fellowship. His *Entente Cordiale* was not only with France, it was with the world. Zellie smiled when she thought that in no country but England could a Sovereign be loved more dearly because his horse had won the Derby. Phenomenal as this might be, it was still concrete fact.

Each year the King appeared to add to the dignity and prestige of his name. He had reigned nine years—a moment only in time, a fraction of his mother's term—yet the Edwardian age would live in History uneclipsed by the greatness of the period which preceded it, but rather consummating and setting the seal on all the glories of the Victorian one.

It was a great and glorious heritage which these two Sovereigns had handed down to their successor—a simple sailor Prince. If only those who had lived under the blessings of these two reigns would rest in quiet confidence, those at home and abroad take pause, the frictions and the factions cease!

Zellie felt apprehensive. All this talk about the German

fleet, what was it but an instrument forged for the protection of German trade, and was not Germany now, like England, trading with the universe? A fleet was a necessary weapon, like the English bobby's truncheon, more lethal of course, but no more likely to be used for any purpose but the maintenance of law and order. What, then, was this hideous spirit of rivalry? Competition at Monsieur Henri Roche's classes was well and good; children should be ambitious at school and in after life too for the sake of their profession and families; ambitious, yes, but not envious, and above all things *not* discontented. Equally she disapproved of threats and menaces, and deplored the party spirit; she wished the nations of the earth and the people of England to live in amity, cherishing their national characters, holding fast to their traditions.

The game of Tom Tiddler always ended in tears at children's parties. "Here am I on Tom Tiddler's ground, gathering gold and silver." The English had played it for a long time, and gathered quite a lot of bullion in the process. They were very fond of games of all sorts, but there would not be so much time for play now, because there was a great deal for Parliament to do. Its sessions were long and arduous: it had not been so when she first came to England.

The Liberals were earnest, hard-working people, and they were new brooms which had set themselves to do a lot of spring-cleaning. There were new troubles on hand now—and these precipitated two general elections. Each

time these conscientious Liberal spring-cleaners were returned, though they needed a little assistance from Labour and Irish members—just to do their charing, “*die grobe Arbeit.*”

After the Parliament Act the House of Commons would be able to snap fingers at the House of Lords. As to financial measures, the poor Lords had no powers at all—*fürchterlich!* Everything to do with money always provoked quarrels. As Zellie had never had any she was at liberty to make this observation. It was ugly to see folks fight, but ugliest of all to see them fighting about money. When she first came here people did not talk about it anyway, and now they talked of nothing else; of public money, or of their own. And whilst they talked they grew bitter.

There was one person especially whose words had a very unpleasant flavour. His style of oratory was so individual as to deserve a nomenclature of its own. It was called “Limehouse.” Zellie, on enquiry, learned the reason. It was at Limehouse that this statesman—now Chancellor of the Exchequer—had initiated it. Limehouse was a quarter in the East End of London largely occupied by the Chinese, where the Chinks had opened restaurants and, rumour had it, opium dens. The Liberals, Zellie remembered, had an affinity for the Chinese; their platforms had once reverberated with shouts on the subject of Chinese labour. Mr. Lloyd George (Zellie could never get that name straight, and preferred to call him Lloyge Geord) made speeches which were distasteful to a

great many people. Once, long ago in the South African war days, it was reported that he had had his Pro-Boer meeting at Birmingham broken up, and had been obliged to leave the hall disguised in a police-constable's uniform.

In 1908 he had become Chancellor when Mr. Asquith obtained the Premiership, and in 1909 he brought out a Budget which incensed public opinion, and exacerbated it by his "limehousing." He proposed to tax the "idle rich" out of existence and to do a great many other disagreeable things to them, in order to raise money for a programme of social reform. These social benefits, Health and Unemployment Insurance, Germany had enjoyed since 1889. Bismarck and Kaiser William I had instituted them, and his grandson William II, in the first year of his reign, had enlarged their scope; so England was just a little behind the times in adopting similar legislation.

Perhaps, thought Zellie, the Chancellor would have antagonised folk less if he had been more polite. Civility is cheap. If he proposed to pick people's pockets he should adopt the ingratiating patter of the confidence-trick man.

The House of Lords objected at once to the Budget and to the vehemence of language of the speech, which, though delivered in the Chinese quarter, had nothing of the urbanity of the Celestials. They threw out the Finance Bill, and occasioned a constitutional crisis.

All this at home: but what was happening abroad? Zellie's countrymen had started to play Tom Tiddler's

Ground (of course they should not have done that, for it is an English game). They sent a gunboat, the *Panther*, to Agadir in Morocco. In 1911 even those people who had condemned Mr. Lloyd George (or was it Lloyge Geord?) most vociferously, commended him. He had made another speech, at the Mansion House, addressed to bankers, where he had metaphorically put on the police-constable's uniform again, this time officially, to protest against the German action. The words "Move along there" took instantaneous effect; the Agadir incident passed, and Zellie, when she lunched at 10 Downing Street, met the Chancellor. (He was not in his bobby's uniform of course, his hair was too long for that or any other uniform.) A lot of people did not want to meet him, but Zellie did not mind. What was good enough for the Asquiths was good enough for her.

She enjoyed these occasional luncheons at 10 Downing Street. The messenger who was whiling away the hours in the hall gave her a friendly nod as she trotted past, down the passage and up the winding staircase to be greeted affectionately by her hostess, and later by the Prime Minister. Such agreeable luncheons they were; politicians, secretaries, children, friends. *Gemütlich!*

The windows of the big drawing-room, with its gay Victorian chintz, looked out over the misty luminous spaces of St. James's Park. You could see the ducks circling around the pond, and hear their wild note. She wondered whether Sir Edward Grey was watching them from a window in the Foreign Office. Sometimes the

flying wild geese cut across the saffron sky, their long necks extended, and Zellie would have liked to ask them whether they had crossed the North Sea, and what they had seen there. Had they peered down at the German fleet, and watched each year the cruisers and the submarines filling the Kiel Canal in ever-increasing number? Had they seen those blind grey forms piling up round Heligoland, that once crumbling but now fortified rock, or had they only caught sight of the periscope of an under-sea monster?

The guests in Downing Street did not talk about Naval Estimates, huge as these were both in Germany and England. They talked about the Licensing Bill, and the Education Act and Welsh Disestablishment. Zellie had no idea what this meant; she was constructive, and did not want the disestablishment of anything except perhaps Suffragettes: they should be given short shrift. They talked of Ireland—yes, Ireland was with them again; it was the worm that dieth not.

Once Mrs. Asquith showed her the room where Cabinet Councils were held and she was suitably impressed. The long table, the simple Chippendale chairs, it seemed very much apiece with all that was England—unostentatious, dignified, homely. In front of each seat a sheaf of blotting-paper. Was it true, she asked, that after each deliberation this was burnt, for fear some unscrupulous person might, by holding it to the mirror, decipher a note which had been made thereon? Or was it only Lewis Carroll's Alice who would have thought

of doing such a thing? Possibly some of the memoranda jotted down on these occasions, if read now, would appear as fantastic, as far removed from the realm of reality as the adventures of the young lady *Through the Looking-Glass*.

The times, distorted through man's passion, were violent, frenzied ones. Zellie on one occasion defended Mr. Asquith from the onslaught of two militant Suffragettes who attacked him on his way back from church. Later he was protected by the continual presence of one or more plain-clothes detectives, who accompanied him wherever he went. Women, Zellie knew, are dangerous when they meddle with politics—and sometimes when they don't—she had always said so.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

"Qui plume a guerre a."
VOLTAIRE. (Letter)

THE WINTER OF 1910-11 Barbara spent in Calcutta. She lived in a cool spacious flat above one of the gates of the Fort. From her wide verandah she could hear a curious babel of sound: the skirling of the pipes of the Gordon Highlanders, the broad Scottish accent of their sentries as they challenged all who passed in and out, the hooting of the sirens of vessels lying in the Hooghli, the yowling of jackals and pie-dogs, and that eternal chitter-chatter of native voices, like sparrows' under the eaves, which night and day is the undertow in the current of Indian life. Such a hotch-potch of East and West, of to-day and the days of Akbar: elephants and motors, water-buffalo wagons on the Maidan, and the first aeroplane to fly in India—it flopped ignominiously to the

ground, never to rise again, after getting up a few feet.

The windows of the Viceroy's car were protected by wire from stones thrown at it. Bengal was said to be rife with sedition, yet the first meeting of the Legislative Assembly was held that year—friendship and enmity, loyalty and disaffection, Swaraj and British Raj, contradictions everywhere as discordant as that confusion of voices which drifted to her from the sandy spaces beyond the old Fort built by Vauban, with its archaic system of defences and *glacis*.

There was a great deal to absorb and fascinate her at Calcutta, and she met many distinguished Civil Servants and interesting soldiers. Sir Douglas Haig was Chief of the Staff to the Commander-in-Chief; Sir John Cowans¹ commanded the Presidency Brigade. She made the acquaintance of Sir John Hewitt, Governor of the United Provinces; Sir Harcourt Butler,² Foreign Secretary; Sir Guy Fleetwood Wilson,³ Financial Secretary; Sir Lawrence Jenkins,⁴ Chief Justice.

¹ Lt.-General Sir John Cowans, G.C.B., G.C.M.G. Born 1862; died 1921. Commanded Presidency Brigade, Calcutta, 1908–10; Director-General of the Territorial Forces, 1910–12; Quarter-Master General of the Forces, 1912–19. Member of H.M.'s Army Council.

² Sir Harcourt Butler, G.C.S.I., G.C.I.E. Born 1869. Foreign Secretary to the Government of India, 1908–15; Governor of Burma, 1922–7.

³ Rt. Hon. Sir Guy Fleetwood-Wilson, G.C.I.E., K.C.B., K.C.M.G., Vice-President and Financial Member of the Council of the Viceroy of India, 1908–13.

⁴ Sir Lawrence Jenkins, K.C.I.E. Died 1928. Chief Justice of Bombay and Bengal; on the Judicial Committee of the Privy Council.

She enjoyed the frivolous side of the Calcutta season also—racing, polo, paper-chases, balls and banquets, parties at Barrackpore, the Viceroy's lovely week-end retreat, where Lady Hardinge was a hostess of exquisite grace and charm.

The Crown Prince of Germany came to tour India that winter, and Barbara saw him on many occasions during his visit to Calcutta. He was a curious complex being—a mixture of naïveté and guile, of intelligence and stupidity. His least attractive trait was a blatant boastfulness which left his listeners speechless. His suite consisted of typical Prussian Junkers; amongst them General zu Donah, a fine old Moltke-like officer, and Lieutenant von Zobeltitz, a monocled equerry who bore the reputation of being a first-rate amateur jockey. The Crown Prince talked big about his own proficiency as a "saddle-flapper." Barbara's husband (after dinner) lightly offered him a ride on a good steeplechaser he owned which was to run in the Indian Grand National Steeplechase at Tollygunge. The "throne-follower," it is fair to say, blanched at this suggestion, but responded to it by offering the services of his A.D.C. instead.

This particular event looked like a certainty for the brown waler, who a few days before had won the big hurdle-race at Calcutta, but the unfortunate change of jockeys altered the complexion of things. Barbara was furious at her husband's courtier-like gesture; the rash offer and the equally unexpected acceptance now jeopardised all chances of success. It was during a Saturday to

Monday at Barrackpore that the crisis developed. Agadir seemed as nothing compared to the gravity of this one. She rated her husband soundly for his ill-considered words; a conference was held after dinner in the guest-bungalow where they were staying and some of the Viceroy's staff were invited to attend. Barbara's laments rang through the moonlit garden, filled with groves of luminous white roses. Sleep there was none.

The next morning, however, whilst the good horse Kaffirpan was doing his early gallop, a note arrived from the Crown Prince. It stated that he had overlooked the fact that by German Army Regulations no officer was permitted to ride in public out of uniform. Lieutenant von Zobeltitz had unfortunately (perhaps wisely) omitted to include this undress one amongst the many others in his baggage; there was therefore no alternative but to refuse the mount, however tempting the invitation. Honour all round was satisfied, and two days later the "cerise jacket, bronze cap" was first past the post, and the biggest steeplechase in India had been won by Lieut.-Colonel M. H. Wilson with Captain Charrington, one of the Commander-in-Chief's aides-de-camp, in the saddle.

After the Crown Prince's visit to the Viceroy ended, he and his staff went on tour in the United Provinces; his unconventional behaviour was a source of anxiety to all those officials who were in charge of him, and it was with sighs of relief that they heard of the approaching date of his departure. Instead of returning in the German

cruiser which had brought him out to India, he chose to sail in a P. & O. liner, by which Barbara too was returning to England. On this voyage he was true to form. When he arrived at Aden the G.O.C. came on board with a gilded, white-uniformed staff, cocks' feathers flying from their helmets. To poor General zu Donah's embarrassment the Crown Prince lay *perdu* in his cabin till just before the Government launch put off, when he reluctantly appeared to greet them. The poor fellow seemed to lack the sense of *Sittlichkeit*.

Zellie heard all these tales from Barbara when she got home. It seemed strange to her that a Hohenzollern should be found wanting in this; perhaps, like young Zobeltitz's uniform, it had been left behind at Berlin. Barbara did not like to point out that even there the supply was scanty. *Sittlichkeit* was a word which she had heard Mr. Haldane use—decency is perhaps the best translation, but decorum comes into the meaning also. *Sittlichkeit* between nations as between individuals is possibly closely observed in Utopia only.

On her way home to England Barbara interrupted her journey in the South of France to visit her mother, who had spent the winter at Bordighera. It was obvious that the months in the Riviera had brought no improvement; she had lost ground since she came there. The years of courageous effort had not been rewarded, and though her fine spirit would not admit defeat there could be little doubt that the illness remained unchecked.

When Barbara reached England she found her father

laid up with a quadruple fracture of the leg, the result of a hunting accident in the Beaufort country. Sir Arbuthnot Lane wired and plated the bones, but many weary months of rest had to follow the operation. The two dear invalids could not meet, as neither was able to leave bed.

In April Barbara's mother was moved back to England. She died in May on Tommy's birthday. She had never lost the hope of recovery, for recovery meant usefulness to her loved ones; it was her helplessness to succour them which irked her more than any of her sufferings. Those who watched her ordeal will ever remember the steadfast quality of her courage which burned with the pure flame of sacrifice before the altar of her loves. Zellie understood how much her children had lost, and she redoubled in tenderness and devotion towards them. Laura's eldest son was born in June, another life belonging to this family for Zellie to welcome and hold fast, another torch lit at the same clear flame. The summer days slipped by; bluebells bloomed and faded in the woods round Wimbledon, where Lord Ribblesdale had taken a house.

King George V and Queen Mary were crowned in July. Barbara's husband came home from India on a few weeks' leave, but he had to return there before the autumn for the Coronation Durbar, which was held the same year. It was decided that he should leave the Army the following spring. The 10th Hussars had a long term of foreign service before them, and with the problem of

the education of his children it appeared too difficult to continue a soldiering life. He had definite ambitions to enter the House of Commons; a seat was offered him. In 1912 he sent in his papers, and began to nurse the constituency of South-West Bethnal Green.

Zellie did not feel quite comfortable about the wisdom of this decision. A German wife would have endured her separation from either husband or family with more fortitude. Barbara's mother had felt the same, and had written, "I hope Barbara will not allow perambulators to come between her husband and his career." But secretly Zellie rejoiced at the prospect of the Wilsons being established permanently in England. Their boys were old enough now for her to teach them; she slid into a new schoolroom with her small grand-pupils, as easily as a hand slips into a glove.

In a pleasant Georgian house on Stanmore Hill, ten miles from London, Zellie established her Lares and Penates, *Larousse*, *Naslin*, all the *Bibliothèque Rose*. It was as if the clock had been put back some thirty years and she was once more at Easton Grey with Tommy and Barbara, listening to the thrushes singing their hearts out in the Irish yews at the twilight hour, after her hand had lit the night-light in the nursery, and punctual eve had hung a star before its window.

Each day she thought of Barbara's mother and grandmother who were no longer here to watch the boys romp round the garden, or return from newt-catching expeditions to the ponds on the Common. There came a sense

that these heavenly guardians were not far distant; in the quiet hours, when the children's laughter or tears had been stilled, she felt they too were watching.

Diana's marriage in 1912 to Captain Percy Wyndham, soldier son of George Wyndham,¹ appeared like a bit of bright blue sky broken through the heavy clouds which had darkened 1911. Zellie's rejoicings as usual were as rapturous as bride and bridegroom's.

She was not much in London at this time, and had to content herself with all that Barbara could tell her of world happenings, and what she could extract from her favourite newspaper—the *Daily Mail*. Each Parliamentary Session she knew from long experience produced a political peep-show; often a novelty, sometimes a revival. At the end of this year the Balkan marionettes began to dance in Whitehall, and she tried to reconstruct the attitude of England towards Turkey to the tune of long-ago.

Lord Salisbury, and before him Mr. Disraeli, had pursued a pro-Turkish policy: there were jokes about "bolstering up the sick man" (they, of course, were *Ur-alt*). Czar Nicholas I had given this sobriquet to Turkey in 1853. But there was nothing sick about Abdul Hamid. He reminded Zellie of one of the Caliphs in the *Arabian Nights*, which she read to the children in a French and much bowdlerised edition. He was powerful, crafty,

¹ George Wyndham, eldest son of Hon. Percy Wyndham of Clouds, Wiltshire. Born 1863; died 1913. Chief Secretary for Ireland, 1900–1905.

and cruel; no wonder his people rose against him and deposed such a Turk of a man. The Balkan States, combined in a League, fell upon Turkey weakened by revolution, and rudderless without the old tyrant. Their victory was easy. Then the vultures got to work. Austria annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina. Italy's conquest of Tripoli, too, gave the Powers to think. Quite a number of disquieting events were taking place the world over. The Balkan League forced Turkey to her knees in December 1912. The peace terms were to be framed in London, which became invaded by astrakhan-capped delegates. Zellie on her rare visits to town enjoyed the sight of these gentlemen who appeared to hail straight from Ruritania. Balkan influences appeared in the "collections" of the Paris dressmakers—the Bulgar sleeve, the Roumanian embroideries, and Turkish trousers were adumbrated in tea-gowns.

Europe was not vitally affected by the peace terms, except where the future of Constantinople was concerned. "Hands off Constantinople," cried the Powers. They had been indifferent to the Armenian massacres, and the Macedonian atrocities had not raised the Continental blood-pressure. The Grand Old Man's sangfroid had been seriously disturbed in olden days by these almost perennial holocausts.

Unfortunately the befezzed heads grew to loggerheads, the Peace Conference broke down, and the embers of war in the Near East rekindled. The cut-throats had recourse to further throat-cutting. Sir Edward Grey's

prescience informed him that the peace of Europe depended upon a satisfactory settlement of the Balkan problem. He proposed a Conference of the Powers. Germany's Ambassador, Lichnowsky, Austria's Mensdorff, Italy's Imperiali: Benckendorff for Russia, and Cambon representing France, were invited to sit at a table presided over by Sir Edward Grey to settle the claims of the belligerent nations.

Zellie knew the two last and liked them, Monsieur Cambon especially, who had praised Barbara's French, unction to the soul of Zellie, and if he could have known of the compliment, to Monsieur Henri Roche also. Monsieur Cambon had frequently lunched at the house of Barbara's parents; his immaculate appearance, snow-white pointed beard, and firmly anchored monocle with its broad black ribbon, had ever excited Zellie's admiration. When asked by someone how long the Conference of the Ambassadors might last, he replied that it would remain in session till six skeletons were found sitting round the table. This *mot* recalled to Zellie the legend of Barbarossa's courtiers exhumed from a grotto, whose beards had grown through the stone table at which they were banqueting with their liege lord.

The crux at the Grey Conference was apparently a little country called Albania (Zellie hastily looked it up on the map; it was a shred of a country; she was obliged to put on her pince-nez in order to locate it, somewhere on the Adriatic). What a name! *très* Anthony Hope, *Merry Widow*, and *Chocolate Soldier*. The Powers insisted that

Albania must be an entity, though Serbia might have way-leave through it to the sea.

Zellie heard an amusing story from one of these patient Ambassadors, who were whiling away so many hours weekly in the company of Sir Edward Grey. London was teeming with tales about the picturesque strangers who were roaming its streets. At a banquet at the Mansion House given to the Balkan delegates, a handsome ring worn by one of them was passed round to be viewed by all. It went from hand to hand till the owner demanded its return. Everyone disclaimed possession of the gem. The Lord Mayor suggested the time-honoured custom of extinguishing the lights; when they were re-kindled he said he expected to find the ring lying in a small but priceless piece of gold plate, which he indicated. After a discreet interval of darkness the blaze of the chandeliers was restored; anxious *café-au-lait* faces were revealed, turned one and all to the table centre from which the gold platter had, unfortunately, vanished.

The summer had faded, the leaves in the parks, prematurely yellow, had fallen from the plane trees, and were being swept up when the Conference ended and the Ambassadors departed on their several ways. Zellie was busy cutting the decaying roses from the beds in the Stanmore garden; the roses, like the sycamore leaves and like the Conference, had died. The plants she tended would bloom again, and all the better, next year for this loving service. Perhaps their Excellencies thought they had cut away much of the old dead wood of hatred and

jealousy from the tree of Europe. They certainly had done their best. Germany was especially painstaking, but Austria had been adamant on the subject of Albania's boundaries. In other respects these gardener-diplomats were genuinely anxious to leave everything tidy and in good heart for the following season.

At the end of August, Martin and Tony Wilson could say several of Lafontaine's fables by heart. It was pretty to hear them recite *Le Loup et l'Agneau*. "*La raison du plus fort est toujours la meilleure*" is the moral, but which of these Ambassadors would have ventured to quote it before returning to his Chancellery after the Conference?

CHAPTER TWELVE

*"But ye, dear youth, who lightly in the hour of fury
Put on England's glory as a common coat."*

ROBERT BRIDGES

WHEN ZELLIE'S CHILDREN had read through *Little Arthur's History of England*, she promoted them to Mrs. Markham's. Who was "Little Arthur"? they often queried. Barbara, when herself a child, had connected him with Arthur Balfour, of whom she often heard her parents speak; but later, when she made acquaintance with this charming elongated person whose thoughtful eyes looked kindly at her through glasses with which he appeared to play cup-and-ball, as he threw back his head on its stem-like neck, she realised that this puerile work could not have been written by him or for him.

His charm was magnetic, his manners polished, the "Quite, quite" of his negative acquiescences fascinated Zellie, and she was outraged when a section of the Press

attacked him. No politician *she* knew had the same grand air as this lowland laird who wrote books on philosophy, played good tennis and golf, enjoyed music, and led the House with the skill of the consummate Parliamentarian!

The Wilson children found Mrs. Markham's *History of England* more palatable than *Little Arthur's*, because at the end of each chapter Mrs. Markham's two sons and their sister put their mother through a questionnaire which, had she not been the sound historian she was, might have proved troublesome. The Markhams prefaced each query with "Pray, dear Mamma, can you tell me . . .?" and puzzling points in the preceding chapter were elucidated; but Zellie's pupils never asked any questions after one of these had been read to them, except perhaps "Is it time for 'break'?" or "Have we finished lessons now?" But when Zellie told Martin and Tony, aged eight and six, that England had gone to war to protect Belgium, they actually put some posers to her, for it seemed so strange to them that Great Britain should love the Belgians with such a pure disinterested love. They knew, of course, that hares came from that country—Martin had actually got one in a hutch at Stanmore—but that was all this ignorant couple had ever heard of the brave little land which was preparing to defend itself against Zellie's countrymen. "Oh!" sighed Zellie, "for the tongue of Mrs. Markham!" How simply and strongly she would have put the case. Perhaps thus . . .

"Your question, dear children (Henry, Richard, and Mary were the names of the historian's interlocutors), is easily answered. You want to know why England is helping to defend Belgium? You see, it is like this. In the year 1830 Belgium revolted against her partnership with Holland, she wanted her independence. Britain did not wish Belgium to be under the influence of France, less still to have a French King upon the Belgian throne. That was very awkward, because our Ministers did not want to be rude to Louis-Philippe, King of France. In the end Lord Grey, who was Prime Minister at that date, and Lord Palmerston, who was Foreign Secretary, arranged (very tactfully, of course) that Prince Leopold of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, our beloved Queen Victoria's favourite uncle, should ascend that throne, and in 1839 a treaty solved all the difficulties about the Dutch-Belgian frontiers and also guaranteed Belgian neutrality. Great Britain, France, Russia, Austria, and Prussia (and Belgium herself) signed this pact, through which they undertook, if necessary, to defend Belgium against attack. This ensured England equally against aggression from the Netherlands."

Barbara's boys, unlike Mrs. Markham's intelligent offspring, were just as bewildered after Zellie had attempted to enlighten them as before. Of course, she was not as lucid on the subject as Mrs. Markham would have been. They understood nothing—least of all why Zellie's eyes kept filling with tears and her lips trembled. "Terrible, *fürchterlich*, *entsetzlich*," was all she could

murmur as she looked out at the unchanged landscape of Craven.

Barbara had come to Eshton a few days after Sir Edward Grey's great speech. Zellie felt shy when she first kissed Barbara, for since August 4th Barbara and Zellie had become enemies.

Barbara's husband had gone straight from the House of Commons to Scarborough (the dépôt of the 10th Hussars) on that day, and Peat, his devoted servant, an old X R.H., had gone with him.

The house at Eshton was garrisoned by women and children. But there were lots of men to be seen everywhere. Hinds on the farms were driving heavy-uddered milkers to shippon or pasture, men were trooping out of the mills of Skipton, those whom this strange condition, this fourth dimension, would not disturb—till later.

The boys clung to their mother's hands, delighted to have her home.

"Is Daddy going to be a soldier again? Will he wear khaki? We haven't seen anyone in uniform yet."

"The policeman came this morning to see Zellie, will she have to go to prison?—he says she's got to go to the police station. Why has she? Are all the Germans in England going to be put in prison?" Their mother could not answer. What did she know about this new machine which war had set in motion? It was working throughout Europe. No buzzer would sound for the operatives to cease work, the looms and spindles would continue to weave their hideous pattern of death for the next four

years; and ever more workers would be called to the shifts. Men would be fetched from the fields and the mills, from the shipbuilding yards and the factories, from their desks and their books and their laboratories, men who knew as little about war as these boys of Barbara, yet each would be required to add one thread to its sinister fabric.

It was little more than two weeks ago that Barbara had sat with Diana on the terrace at Stanmore, when war was possible but remote. Barbara was surprised that Diana wept as she told her Percy Wyndham's regiment, the Coldstream Guards, was in the first division of the British Expeditionary Force under orders for active service. It was, she thought, too soon for tears, so much might happen still. Many were labouring hard for peace. War scares sold newspapers, one should not believe a tenth of what one read in them. The Austrians might unsheath their swords, and Germany might rattle hers, but the other nations were too cool-headed to be drawn into conflict. Sir Edward Grey was a mediator; he had proved himself such in the Ambassadors Conference.

Barbara and her husband had been invited to spend the first week-end in August with Lord and Lady Ancaster at Grimsthorpe. A large party assembled there, but despite the congenial company and the beauty of the house and park, there was not one of the guests who did not wish himself back at home, for how could one laugh and talk as with strained ears all listened to the distant thunder and watched the horizon for the flash of lightning. There

were soldiers staying with the Ancasters who were ill at ease, full of misgivings as to the policy of an anti-war Liberal Government. Would honour be sacrificed? The tension was unendurable. They left on Sunday morning by car to return to London, where hour-to-hour news was obtainable. The hostess talked of the food shortage which, should the country be involved in war, would make itself felt instantly. A lot of people were already talking about famine. It would, of course, be wrong to hoard, they said, and dangerous. . . . Prices would rise to such phenomenal levels that revolution could not be averted, merely delayed. . . .

Thus they chatted, whilst some played tennis and bridge and golf; but as they called "Deuce—Vantage," or "No trumps," or "All square," there was only one cry in every heart: "Is it Peace or War?"

Shreds of conversation, immediately after the Serajevo assassination, came back to Barbara's mind. A South African financier had said to her that it was advisable to get out of all commitments. But was there not one which was as binding as life itself?—a promise had been given. That was what the Cabinet was deciding during the first three days of August.

Barbara was unable to get into the Gallery of the House of Commons to hear Sir Edward Grey's statement on Monday, August 3rd. The House was full to overflowing, so she stood on the deserted Terrace and watched the even-flowing Thames. The swift tide was carrying gay-coloured steam barges on its bosom, and little tugs,

like children's toys, which dipped their funnels obsequiously as they passed under the bridges. Two grey mute-swans were making their way down-stream. The pace was better than they liked, and every now and again they trod water and attempted to turn broadside on; but the pause was momentary, the current was too strong, it turned them round, it swept them relentlessly forward; they were flotsam on the waters. Was this also the fate of nations? Was there no stemming of the tide, no riding at anchor till it changed?

Inside the House members were listening to the statement of the Foreign Secretary. His words burnt into their consciousness. "Mobilisation of the Fleet has taken place, mobilisation of the Army is taking place, but we have as yet taken no engagement. . . . There is but one way in which the Government could make certain at the present moment of keeping outside this war, and that would be that it should immediately issue a proclamation of unconditional neutrality. We cannot do that."

That promise! That promise, signed and sealed, to Belgium in 1839, and again repeated in 1870, when France was invaded by Germany. *Semper fidelis*, what choice had Britain?

Before Sir Edward Grey sat down he received information from the Belgian Legation which was not in his possession when he had come to Westminster. He read it out to the faithful Commons.

"Germany sent yesterday evening, at seven o'clock, a note, proposing to Belgium friendly neutrality, covering

free passage on Belgian territory, and promising maintenance of independence of the Kingdom and possession at the conclusion of peace, and threatening in case of refusal, to treat Belgium as an enemy. A time-limit of twelve hours was fixed for the reply. The Belgians have answered that an attack on their neutrality would be a flagrant violation of the rights of nations, and that to accept the German proposal would be to sacrifice the honour of a nation. Conscious of its duty, Belgium is firmly resolved to repel aggression by all possible means."

It was with these words ringing in their ears that members of Parliament poured forth from the Chamber. In a moment they invaded the Terrace where Barbara had been standing alone. It was humming with their grave-toned voices.

The swans had disappeared; the stream had carried them far below the Houses of Parliament, it was sweeping them onwards swiftly. Where would they find a reedy halting-place?

There was little traffic in London that night, but there was no sleep. The city was full of the sound of footfalls. Up and down the streets countless feet moved restlessly. Interrupted bursts of cheering, and snatches of singing could be heard, only the footsteps were continuous. They marched aimlessly without pause and without direction. Men filled the breadth and length of Whitehall; they trod the place where the Cenotaph now stands, ignorant that the ground on which they stood would later be held holy. Whilst they paced others—Ministers—sat in the

Cabinet Room motionless, waiting for the reply to the Ultimatum addressed to Berlin. It demanded that a satisfactory answer about Belgium should reach London before midnight. The fleet was waiting too. When Big Ben struck, no answer had come.

Barbara was glad to get home to Yorkshire and to her children. She felt she had reached a calm haven. There was much to do here in connection with the families of the Reservists called to the colours. The August days flashed by, full of varied activities. Strangely enough no lovelier August had ever graced this landscape. The skies above reminded her of the flawless splendour of Indian ones. The sun burned fiercely, even here in the moisture-laden West.

The knowledge that the British Army was falling back day by day—hopelessly outnumbered and outgunned—was rendered infinitely more poignant by this gracious summer weather. The scorching sun of France was searing the retreating divisions; it was adding to the exhaustion of the troops, increasing their sufferings.

Zellie's thoughts travelled to those field-grey figures, *unsere Feldgrauen*, who were driving all before them; but these were no more hers than the others, the khaki-clad, who were falling back and fighting, and fighting to fall back again. *Herr Gott*, what a war! . . . In Zellie's heart the same conflict as on the burning land of France, each victory of German arms brought tears for those she loved, and English gains caused hers to flow. As if that

were not grief enough there was another—Sorrow's crown of Sorrow.

Zellie read the papers voraciously, though incredulously. She believed little of what she saw in them, nevertheless they revealed to her the fate of others like herself. Reading at random in *The Times* of August 17th, she learnt that one—William Charles Hank—was charged at a London police court for failing to register under the Aliens Restriction Order. In his defence he admitted that he was a German subject, but "he did not think the Order applied to him." He stated he had been twenty-five years in England, had belonged for twenty to a Volunteer Corps, served now in the Royal Engineers Territorial Regiment, whose Captain gave him a good character.

Charles William Hank's case was her own (though she with flaming cheeks and beating heart had registered at Skipton Police Station the first day she was required to). She too had not thought of herself as an enemy alien, but as a volunteer in the service of a country she loved as deeply as her own.

There seemed some fearful law of equity operating, despite the apparent injustice of these times—a life for a life—a love for a love. The news of her nephew Kurt's death reached her only a few days before she heard of Percy Wyndham's. Her brother was mourning for his eldest son before Diana's husband was killed in the fighting near Compiègne. She received no details from Germany of how and where Gustav's brilliant boy had

fallen, but she knew that Percy had lost his life during the first days of the Battle of the Marne, when the tide had already turned, and the long retreat of the British Expeditionary Force had ended. He had fought desperately the week before at Landrecies—ambushed by the Germans, the commanding officer had given the order that they should “stand and die like Coldstreamers.” Heavy as their losses were that day, Percy had come through unscathed. It was near the Château of Soupir he had lost his life . . . but his regiment was advancing.

Soupir—a fitting name. The old French dressmaker who made Diana’s black dress knew that country—a country of high woods and mossy verdure, “*C’est un pays calme,*” she said, “*il dormira bien*”—and Zellie, learning of this, thought of it thereafter in terms of English woods (she had forgotten those of France) and dreamed of the Easton Grey coverts, close-carpeted with wind-flowers and primroses, and of the Eshton woods where snow-drops whiten every glade. In these, decked now for summer, she, an enemy alien, wandered comfortless.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

“For a tomb they have an altar, for lamentation, memory, and for pity, praise.”

SIMONIDES

(Written after the battle of Marathon)

IT HAD BECOME increasingly difficult to live at Eshton Hall as time went on; a house of this size when servants were unobtainable and coal was strictly rationed, was habitable only in summer. Barbara was wondering how to solve the puzzle when the bombardment of Scarborough solved it for her. A large girls' school decided that the East Coast was now a danger zone and applied to rent the Hall for six months, after which time they felt convinced they would be able to return to their own premises—our fleet would by then have swept the German Navy off the face of the waters. Miss Wood, her staff, and some seventy pupils took over the house and remained in it for more than three years. During the long summer holidays the Wilson family Boxed and

Coxed with the schoolmistress, they returned to Eshton for August and September. Hill House at Stanmore was still theirs; the death of Barbara's father-in-law had taken place in January 1914, a few weeks before the by-election at South-West Bethnal Green, at which her husband had won the seat. It was proposed to sell the lease of Hill House, but the threatening international situation was not a propitious moment for such a proposition.

Directly after the declaration of war, Barbara's husband obtained command of a Territorial cavalry regiment—the Middlesex Hussars—(1st County of London Yeomanry). In the spring of 1915 they were under orders for the Dardanelles. Barbara was with her husband till he sailed, and Zellie was in command of the unit of children at Stanmore. It was a relief to hear that Charles Lister, placed *en disponibilité* by the Foreign Office for one year, had obtained a commission in the same regiment. Charles would be well taken care of by his brother-in-law. Zellie knew how indifferent he was to hardship, how contemptuous of danger. He was no born campaigner as his brother Tommy had been, he was far too impetuous in the execution of duty. But even as Zellie was comforting herself with this thought, she learnt that with characteristic impulsiveness he had effected an exchange into the Hood Battalion of the Naval Reserve; his eager spirit rebelled against the protracted period of training on the East Coast, and this regiment was on the roster to sail a few weeks prior to the Middlesex Hussars.

Petrol was now severely rationed. Barbara could only obtain enough to run the car at Eshton for estate purposes. Zellie scarcely ever left the children. She was marooned at Stanmore, and lived with them, her books, and her memories. The newspapers she dismissed after a cursory glance, with incredulous grunts. Her letters from Germany were few, they arrived open with many lines in them blacked out by the censors—they told her nothing that she wanted to know.

Now that her country was divided from the one she lived in, she felt stir within her a deep love for the land of her fathers, for its smiles and its frowns. She remembered tenderly both its virtues and its shortcomings; she dwelt on a thousand episodes of her childhood. Ghost-faces came back to her which had been forgotten across the gulf of years, words and gestures of those at home (but where was home now?) quickened, quickened the patriotism which had lain dormant, wrapped in the womb of her love for this other land.

The old melodies of childhood rang in her ears when the first war-Christmas dawned:

*Ihr Kinderlein kommet,
Ach kommet doch all.*

Children are nationals of no country but the Kingdom of Heaven, thought Zellie, so at Stanmore in 1914 the tree was lit as of old, for the Christ-Child made no distinction between those wax candles which flickered in German or in English homes. Each little coloured taper,

she knew, was burning fervently before the altar of Peace. The Star that led the shepherds would ultimately lead the nations. She often stood at her bedroom window wondering which it was.

One evening the parlourmaid ran into the boudoir where she sat reading to Barbara, and told them to come quick. "There's the Zeppelin—you can see from the garden!" They followed her, bewildered, and stood under the dark ilexes watching the firmament: it looked like an oblong bar of gold, then in the twinkling of an eye guns popped like the salvos of toy pistols, smoke threw a film across that portion of the sky—it appeared to buckle, crumple, disintegrate, and vanish from their sight.

"They've shot it down," someone called out jubilantly. "They've brought it down near Cuffley Hill," another said later. Such a lovely thing as it had been, luminous, magical, fire-laden! Whilst it was in the sky she would have liked the children to see—now it was a heap of ashes—and dead men: but the children were asleep. On air-raid nights they slept too, and that was good, otherwise they might have been afraid, for when the moon was full and the air was still, for a whole week maybe, the maroons sounded nightly to warn Londoners of the approach of enemy aircraft. Only children could have slept their tranced sleep through the hell of bombardment which followed.

It was during the last period of the war that these raids, becoming ever more numerous, broke down the morale of the city dwellers. They trekked out of town

at evening in their hundreds, in carts, in lorries, in tradesmen's vans, on bicycles, on foot: many made Stanmore Common their camping-ground. Pitiful refugees with white faces lit by the glare of searchlights which, like the hands of some titanic clock, moved restlessly across the dial of the heavens. Barbara and Zellie brought hot drinks out of the house to give to some of the women and children.

Sky and earth and sea filled with the wrath of war. Zellie covered the bullfinch's cage in the schoolroom with an extra-thick cloth; it had mistaken night for morning, and piped its little German tunes in the silence between the shattering explosions of anti-aircraft guns—but the children slept. . . .

Charles had been wounded twice in the Peninsula; the second time he had a long convalescence, nursed in the convent of the Blue Sisters at Malta. He returned to duty. It was in August 1915 that he received his third and fatal wound. He died on the hospital ship which was moving him to Alexandria.

He had written only a short while before to a friend: "I now know that I shall not die, I do not mean that I shall not be killed."

The sorrows of war would have been unendurable but for the communion of grief, the stricken borrowed fortitude from others grief-stricken as themselves. There seemed no door on whose lintel the sign of the Passover had appeared. The mother of Julian and Billy Grenfell came to the Memorial Service for Charles in Gisburne

Church. Julian, like Charles, had died of wounds, in May, and Billy was killed two months later. Zellie stored the remembrance of the days when they were all there from Oxford, the wind-blown coursing days in Ribble valley. She inscribed their names reverently in her heart. To her brother in Germany she wrote—"always the tallest poppies (*Mohnblumen*) are taken."

In his reply he told her of the death of his remaining son.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

*"But still the dead shall more than keep
The beauty of their early sleep;
Where comely looks shall never wear
Uncomely, under toil and care;
The fair at death be always fair,
Still fair to living, thought and love,
And fairer still to God above
Than when they died in beauty."*

WILLIAM BARNES

(Version used by Walter de la Mare)

THE WAR DURING 1917 was less evident in the North of England, which still seemed detached from the fever of London and the troop-infested South. Scarcely a uniform to be seen here, food-rationing in this part of the country was negligible. The wide green fields and hills in order stood, immutable and unchanged as Zellie remembered them when first she came to Yorkshire. Only the papers to remind her; the *Daily Mail* which shrieked persistently of German atrocities, and *The Times* from whose cryptic utterances she could never deduce whether the British Army was advancing or static. She got very tired of the reiteration of names and places. "Always the Somme!" she would sigh. And indeed it was always the Somme. But the Somme seemed far

removed from the silver waters of the river Aire, and the golden-brown trickle of the beck gurgling past the Eshton woods to join it. Nevertheless she would come into the library every afternoon, and in her short-sighted way would grope around tables and chairs inquiring "Where *are The Times?*"

Letters for her arrived from Württemberg, deeply edged with mourning. Sometimes a line or two, sometimes just a word was blocked out by the censor, but Gustav and Martha at Esslingen were learning wisdom. Their communications were trivialities only; scarcely a sentence referred to their heartbreak. It was over three years now since Kurt had died of wounds, and Kuno had been blown to pieces just a year after the death of his brilliant brother. Kuno's death had affected his mother most deeply, but Gustav was mourning his first-born, whose legal career had given precocious promise. Whereas little Kuno had only just left the University. . . . But Kuno had been difficult to rear, one of twins. His mother wrote often of those first months of his life; a premature child, she had *forced* him to live . . . for what?

Barbara's husband like other members of Parliament had been obliged to return to England to attend to his political duties for a while, so August in Craven seemed to be made something on the pattern of bygone years. Grouse-shooting (the birds were sent to hospitals and convalescent homes), tennis, and the ebb and flow of visitors. At Laura's castle in Scotland the same. She wrote to tell Zellie that they had camps of

German prisoners lumbering on the hills, pit-props were urgently needed for the trenches, and acre after acre of redwood trees was being felled and carried down the valley by aerial railways. Laura had spoken to some of these men; they were nearly all Bavarians, and often wept when they talked of their homes and families. Fine-looking fellows accustomed to the work, many of them foresters in the service of the German Government. In the evening they sang part-songs, and from their wooden hutments voices rose through the still Highland air, singing strange words which only the everlasting hills could understand.

German prisoners were working here in Craven too, loaned to the farmers, and were well spoken of by them. At Skipton there was a prison camp for officers. One could see uniformed figures moving about between the shacks behind a weak-looking barbed-wire fence. Once a large party of them on the road appeared under the escort of a British officer. Utter tedium was written on their faces; they seemed dehumanised, indifferent and stupefied as cattle that are being driven to market. "Don't stare at them," said Barbara's husband. The townspeople objected to the vicinity of the camp. It was in a cold exposed position, and their quarters were scourged by influenza during the winter months.

The Eshton children were growing fast. The oldest, who was sitting here on Zellie's lap when war was declared, was now a schoolboy, and the second would follow him to his preparatory school in another twelve

months. Peter, the baby, was still in a blue linen tunic; playing in deep meadow-grass or pasture-land, he looked like a speedwell or periwinkle flower that had strayed there. The three went to Gisburne occasionally to spend a day with their grandfather, but locomotion was difficult.

Zellie enjoyed these afternoons in her old haunts at Gisburne. She sat under the lime trees to brood over the Past. On this swing had sat Viola Tree while Tommy Lister pushed her. The pretty lyric from *Véronique* had been the vogue then. "*Poussez, poussez l'escarpolette,*" and Viola, with her long exquisite legs dangling from the seat, could carol like a lark. *L'Escarpolette*. . . . Sophie confused the song with the Fragonard picture of that name. Seventeenth century, twentieth century, it was all the same to old Pendle Hill, whose blue humped contour rose at the end of the long lime avenue. What did the Lancashire Witches who lived there think of it all? Zellie wondered.

At the back of the house was the lawn steeply overlooking the Ribble. Here Julian Grenfell and Billy had idled in their bathing drawers, and Zellie had blushed to see Laura and Diana in such close proximity to practically nude boys. What would their mother have said? Zellie seemed to see her too, passing from sun to shadow, from house to garden, always hurried, always cumbered with serving, but as much of Mary as of Martha in her, she was nearly always gay. And Charles, he had ridden his roan pony round the grass enclosure where she was sitting, and had kept his rabbits and guinea-pigs under

this very lime tree. But Charles and Tommy and their mother, and Billy and Julian, had joined Kurt and Kuno. It was as well one woman was with them to look after them—such a party of boys!

"*Adieu, Lord Ribblesdale, vous allez bien?*" His tall figure was framed in the doorway, with the grandsons beside him. He greeted her with his radiant smile. They were going to the village to visit Ben Nutter, the old rogue of a farmer-dealer, whose loose-boxes were empty now, for the remount officers had taken everything away that could stand up on four legs—nevertheless he had a surprise waiting there for the children. Grandfather and boys started up the drive. Zellie watched them, and some of their happy chatter reached her. "A donkey?" "He said it was a donkey, and we can buy it for thirty shillings." "I've got thirty shillings in my money-box." "When will the donkey come to Eshton?" "Can we have him to-day?" "May he go back with us?"

But it was not possible to take the donkey—small as he was—back in the car; some other means of getting him over would be found later. The boys were beside themselves with excitement—and quarrelling.

"He's mine because I paid for him," said Martin. "No he's not. Grandpapa is going to give you a skewbald pony; you're too old for a donkey" from Tony. . . . Driving home there was a pitched battle.

The Secretary of State for India and his wife came to Eshton the next day. The sight of Cabinet boxes and

pouches was familiar to Zellie; had she not seen them come and go at the Asquiths? She basked in the mild glory which radiated from these signs of office, and was permanently amazed that great men were as accessible and leisured as more obscure ones. She had known so many, and all had given her the impression that week-ends and sport were the chief of their diet. But of course there was Lloyge Geord, Lloyge Geord was different. He impressed her. He was a thunderer, earth-shaking, apocalyptic. There was something German about his methods. Means were justified by ends and devil take the hindmost. Of course he had behaved very badly to Mr. Asquith, but he had got the shells that the British Army needed. Even so Lloyge Geord had not got a Big Bertha; only the Germans had that, and this monster gun was shelling Paris from a distance of sixty miles, they said—*Kolossal!* Krupp's handiwork was not vulnerable and ephemeral like Count Zeppelin's. She had not forgotten that exquisite fire-fly in the firmament, seen from the Stanmore gardens, a golden streak which had curled up suddenly and vanished as completely as a parlour fire-work. It had made the sky brilliant for a few moments above Cuffley, just time to call out to the maids and others to come and see.

Zellie was not on the same intimate terms with Edwin Montagu¹ as she was with the older politicians. He did

¹ Hon. Edwin S. Montagu, son of 1st Lord Swaythling. Born 1879; died 1927. Under-Secretary for India, 1910; Financial Secretary to the Treasury, 1914; Secretary of State for India, 1917.

not even call her Zellie, as did Asquith and Haldane and Balfour and Curzon. She watched his giant form and fine brooding brow with curiosity, and liked him for having had a German nurse (he had told her about Rosie), but naturally there was no interchange of friendly banter between them. When the Montagus and others were at Eshton, Zellie supped in the schoolroom.

It took three days for those at Gisburne to arrange the means of conveying Neddy, the diminutive donkey, to Eshton. Just before luncheon on a cloudless day, the butler announced that a German prisoner was in the drive and wished to speak with Miss Bühler. He had a note for her. The information was a bombshell. Zellie blushed to the roots of her hair, Sir Mathew Wilson and Venetia Montagu¹ interrupted their game of *béziq*ue. At first Zelle refused to go; she scuttled like a scared rabbit from room to room—"Me? Why? Where?" It was only when they all went out on the terrace that she consented to come too.

He was standing on the gravel, fifty yards from the porch, hot and travel-stained, in the shabbiest of khaki tunics and much-patched slacks. Hatless, his brow streaked with lines and sweat, and his hair, golden as a child's, blowing in the wind. He held an envelope in his hand addressed to Zellie, and Neddy's halter rope was dangling round his wrist.

"The donkey has come!" the boys jubilated. The

¹ Venetia Montagu, daughter of 4th Baron Stanley of Alderley, afterwards Lord Sheffield.

prisoner did not smile as they thronged around him. "Speak to him in German," they called out. But Zellie, as tongue-tied as the Saxon, still deeply flushed, could only stroke the donkey's neck.

Such a small grey donkey, piteously over-eared, with legs as frail as a Chippendale work-table's, and a rat tail ending in a tuft. The prisoner looked as if he could have carried it comfortably under one arm, and it appeared far too fragile a mount for the big boys. Their mother broke the ice in German. "Would you like a glass of beer? You've had a long walk." He nodded. When the gong sounded and the others returned to the house, Zellie addressed a few words to him. What was there to say, anyway? She read the letter, it was from Ben Nutter, the previous owner of the donkey, asking her to see her fellow-countryman.

"Are you happy?" she asked. He shook his head. "You want to go back to Germany?" Another shake. "I am a Swabian," she ventured reassuringly. "Have you ever been in Württemberg?" He gave her the name of his village in Saxony. He volunteered the information that he had never been wounded; he was not working too hard; they gave him plenty to eat. He was going to walk back to the farm at once, and could not stay a moment. As he passed Neddy's rope to her, his hand grazed hers. It was a huge red hand, flecked with freckles, and downed with thick yellow hair. After he had drunk the beer, there was nothing to keep him. He turned on his heels without a salutation and trudged down the drive.

The little donkey was being led towards the stable. Down his back and across his shoulders was clearly marked the brown-black cross which all of his kind are said to carry since Our Blessed Saviour bestrode one. Brother Ass, Man, and Godhead united by that cross, Conqueror and Conquered, Prisoner and Released.

Eshton settled down to its usual summer afternoon programme when the pre-luncheon excitement had evaporated. The sun, unreliable and capricious that year, came in and out of extravagant galleons of cloud which drifted between lagoons of blue. It crept behind the pyramid sycamore on the lawn where the children played rounders. The phloxes in the kitchen garden shook out their rain-dashed petals, and the dark stars of clematis opened apace along the south wall; every breath of warmth seemed to add colour to the borders. Zellie enjoyed her usual occupation snipping the dead heads off the flowers. She gossiped the while to the gardener's wife and daughter, who worked there now that other garden labour was unprocurable. She met the boys in the stable saying good-night to the donkey.

"We're going to call him Cadichon, like the donkey in *Les Mémoires d'un âne*."

"I hope you won't be cruel to him, as Sophie was," she said.

"No, we shan't be cruel. Sophie's *your* name, so *you* must be careful." They hung one on each arm as she walked back to the house.

That night as she got ready for bed the children's

words came back. Cruel to Cadichon, no: but had she been cruel, or at least not kind to the prisoner? Why was it she found no word of solace for him? None came to her at the time, and now it was too late. He was in a strange land—but so for the matter of that was she. Strangers and sojourners both of them, and those who belonged to this country were murdering those who belonged to theirs. Hand against hand—she should have clasped his for a moment as he gave her the donkey's lead, that large field-worker's hand, simple and strong as a plough, sun-stained and golden as wheat. She looked at her own as she picked up her hair-brush; it felt soft and weak, only fit for knitting, or for holding a pen, or guiding a child's steps. Men's hands were needed for war. The moon looked in at her window. She wondered where the prisoner slept at Ben Nutter's, perhaps in the hay above a shippon, and the moon was shining in on him too, as it was on Cadichon's back marked by the Cross.

When the Secretary of State for India came down late next morning, he complained of a night of insomnia. He had not slept a wink, and in the small hours he had decided to deal with some files which had reached him at tea-time. He proceeded to search the downstairs rooms for the pouch; in vain—it had vanished. Yet he remembered that, as he went out to watch the rounders, it was lying on the marble-topped table in the hall, under the clock; he could swear to that. It must be there of course, as it had come with the post, and he had not moved it. He looked in every conceivable and inconceivable place,

padding round the dark spook-filled house, conscious that, behind closed doors, all the other occupants were sleeping soundly. Chilled and thwarted, he returned to his bedroom.

By the time he related his nocturnal wanderings to the family, he had convinced himself that there had been foul play. The papers had been stolen, the bag had been tampered with. He worked up a drama with a wealth of ingenuity, and brought suspicion to bear on the German prisoner episode of the day before. A more far-fetched hypothesis from a less imaginative person would have sounded preposterous, but Edwin Montagu's skilful exposition, half joking, half serious, clothed it with more than a semblance of veracity. Of course the villain had had an accomplice in the house, and who but a fellow-countryman could have connived with him? Zellie, completely unaware of this fairy-tale indictment which he had elaborated, sat beside him at tea. Nevertheless the obstinate disappearance of the papers was beginning to cause real dismay and inconvenience. Barbara's husband said to her gravely, "Perhaps Zellie *is* doing some spying; she may have taken it, after all."

A few hours later the truant pouch was found in the gun-room, locked as usual, the contents undisturbed. An over-zealous housemaid had mistaken it for a cartridge-bag and placed it there, along with the others.

Zellie was told of the incident—"And if it could have shortened the war, would you have blamed me? *Ach mein Gott*—always the *Somme*."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

"But I ask *their* witness, to whom the war has changed the aspect of the earth, and the imagery of Heaven. . . .

"Ask *their* witness, and see if they will not reply that it is well with them and with theirs; that they would not, if they might, receive back their Gifts of Love and Life, nor take again the purple of their blood out of the cross on the breastplate of England."

RUSKIN

BARBARA CALLED FOR LAURA at her house on November 11th, 1918. She had come to Curzon Street by bus. She and her fellow passengers were expectant—"Eleven o'clock" was being said by everyone: by that time the news would be announced officially. The streets were preparing for it, there were not many vehicles about; some were drawing up, others were already stationary when she and Laura crossed Piccadilly and entered the Green Park. There were a few casual strollers on the grass and along the paths, but at every step they took, more gathered. All were moving in one direction. As they neared the Palace and looked back, crowds were behind them, and as the multitude increased it pressed faster. Many were running, but when they reached the

forecourt of Buckingham Palace a large assembly was already there.

No one was conscious of the passage of time; the guns spoke punctually, they stabbed the minutes. Was this the interlude of a moment or of eternity? Armistice, what did it mean? Victory—Peace? If victory, why were there tears on every face? “He will come—they will both come—we shall see them.” A window was flung wide. King George stood on the balcony; the Queen joined him. At first the cheers were subdued, soft as Amens, tender as blessings; then the volume grew, it surged and broke mighty as an Atlantic billow, it crashed time after time through the still autumn air. The guns themselves were silenced by the barrage of cheering.

Barbara found herself standing beside Monsieur de Soveral, the Portuguese Ambassador. “Wait,” he said, “wait here, we are living in History. . . .”

The King’s loyal subjects would not let him go; again and again they called him back to them. A scarlet-and-gold cloth was flung across the balustrade of the balcony; it made the only splash of colour in the grey landscape till a gleam of sun came through the mist, and the massed bands of the Brigade filled the forecourt of the Palace. The National Anthem was played again and again, and all those airs which have become Battle-song and Dirge.

“What is *this* war called?” one of Zellie’s children asked one day. “The Wars of the Roses is such a pretty

name!" "The Great War," she answered. "If war be measured in sacrifice it is well named."

For Zellie the turbulent hours of rejoicing left no sting (*Nunc Dimittis* was in her heart). The shadows had grown long, the sun was low, yet in this impoverished and mutilated world a great deal had been left to her that she could cherish. Her usefulness to others had not ended.

The Wilson boys were of school age, so Barbara no longer needed her; but Laura did. Zellie's hand would not leave the plough till these, her youngest, had been grounded. There was time for the task and then perhaps no more.

She migrated to Beaufort Castle without much enthusiasm. Scotland had never been congenial to her; but she was indifferent to her habitat, and forgave Inverness-shire for being what it is when she reached a schoolroom there and found two children waiting in it—a boy and a girl again. She had a marked preference for boys, but this one, Shimi, was not the kind she was accustomed to. He had the lust of the hunter on him, he loved to snare and to kill. He slew with bow and with arrow, with sling and stone, with naked hand. He ranged wide and solitary watching the flight of birds, marking them down with keen eyes as his prey.

Zellie was apprehensive—she spoke to Laura of her fears, tactfully. "Do you think, Laura *chérie*, that he is entirely *human*? I don't want to upset you, but I saw a funny expression on his face when he was watching the

sheep in the Park the other day. Do you think it possible that he is a little, just a tiny bit, *wolf*, or that he might (later on, of course) turn into one?" Nevertheless she loved him, this Mowgli-boy, and his gentle sister, whose hair was cut like the Knave of Hearts', leaving a very small window for her pretty face.

But when the Master of Lovat was transferred to London he often brought a blush to Zellie's cheek. Did he not succeed in tickling a fish in the Serpentine—unique exploit!—and having caught this odious *poisson*, prepare to carry it home in triumph to his mother's house? The stinking trophy fell from his sporran in Hyde Park, and having discovered his loss, the kilted angler fell on his knees *en pleine rue* to pray St. Anthony for its return. No, really, Zellie had had enough, *genug*, too much indeed!

At Beaufort she filled the schoolroom book-shelves with the collection of educational works she had used at Easton Grey and Gisburne. A red cloth-bound volume entitled *Near Home* was amongst these, which the previous generation had enjoyed bi-weekly as the dessert dish of the geography lesson. It was pointed out by Father Ronald Knox, excellent friend of Zellie as he was, that for Catholic children this was not a happy choice. He opened it at a page where the author makes the following statement: "Barren Iceland is better off than Sicily—and why?—because it is Protestant." But Zellie, unabashed, swept such protests away with "*Ach*, nonsense!" No one ever knew whether this contemptuous comment was

directed against the author or the Catholic faith. In these matters she had learned how to live and to let live.

Though she was growing feebler than of old, less able to go for walks and scrambles with the children and to skate and play rounders, in spirit she was no less ardent. There were records of sheer gladness which she chronicled in her diary. One, a red-letter day, was when Queen Mary came to Beaufort.

Laura spoke to Her Majesty of Zellie's faithful association with the family, and the Queen asked to see her. Trembling, in her Sunday dress, she entered the Royal Presence—the little *Knix* she made brought back her girlhood days—she had bobbed thus to all married ladies before she left Germany, a round of bobs on the days Frau Finanzrath had given her *Kaffeeklatsch*. The Queen spoke to Zellie of her homeland, asked her about the part of Germany from which she came, admired the flowers which Zellie had, during the luncheon hour, arranged for Laura. Some ox-eye daisies gathered in the meadows. Actually Zellie was no pundit in such matters, and had substituted these for some rarer blooms which the gardeners had brought in; for Zellie preferred the daisies to the more interesting plants; they seemed to speak to her of simple pleasures, of frugal joys, of pure hearts, and home—such things as Zellie loved. Queen Mary may have felt the same about the nosegays, for she praised their unstudied grace.

Soon the Lovat children's schoolroom education was completed; they were ready for more advanced lessons

which other teachers would undertake. The last stage of Zellie's long route-march was over. When these Highland children roamed through Strathglass, she sat in some sheltered nook watching them and the hills, in that land of half-light which seems for ever waiting for spring. Laura had told her that Strathglass had been described to her by one of the crofters as the Vale of Rest. Zellie felt that she had reached it.

As the colour faded from the heather, mists veiled the river. The birch-boles grew more silvery with the evening and the lines of Goethe's tender lyric came to her, the *Wanderers Nachtlied*:

*Über allen Gipfeln
Ist Ruh',
In allen Wipfeln
Spürest Du
Kaum einen Hauch;
Die Vögelein schweigen im Walde.
Warte nur, balde
Ruhest Du auch.*

"Come, children dear, *Komm*, baby sweet, it's late," called Zellie.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

*"I bind unto myself to day
The strong name of the Trinity,
By invocation of the same,
The Three in One, and one in Three*

*I bind unto myself the power
Of the great love of Cherubim;
The sweet 'Well done' in Judgement hour;
The service of the Seraphim,
Confessor's faith, Apostle's word,*

*All good deeds done unto the Lord
And purity of virgins' souls."*

The "Breastplate" of St. Patrick,
ascribed to King Alfred.

SOMETIMES WHEN THE TELEPHONE rang in her parlour which looked out over traffic-ridden Chapel Street, Zellie passed in review the adjuncts which, since the days of her childhood, had been tacked on to civilisation.

They had not contributed greatly to her enjoyment. She preferred life *sans* telephone or motor transport, gramophone or wireless, but such as they were she had grown accustomed to them though never practised in their use. The telephone was especially difficult and "contrairy." She preferred to communicate through a third party when its bell disturbed the serenity of her flat. To establish direct communication by this means always flustered her considerably, and made her flush;

her voice then became unrecognisable, and her words were an incomprehensible macédoine of three languages. She was always uncertain as to what the speaker at the other end had said or was saying.

Motors she suffered gladly; they enabled her to hurry more swiftly to those she loved. The gramophone and the radio, though she remained completely incapable of regulating either, were not unwelcome alternatives to reading.

She had always loved the theatre since the days when Sarah Bernhardt had stirred her soul in Paris. A cinema was a poor substitute for a play; it was cheaper, but it went too fast; perhaps that was why she was never sure whether she really and truly understood what was happening. The captions remained on the screen for less than a minute; there was time to read the first few lines, but not enough to finish them all. It was easier when her companion read them out to her, but when a storm-motif heralded the advent of the villain it was difficult to hear.

The adjustment of ideas had to be as quick as the shutter of the camera. She had no sooner grasped that the hero and heroine were pelting hell-for-leather through the desert on their mustangs, pursued by a jealous lover, equally well mounted, than, for some inexplicable whim on the part of the producer, she was obliged to transport herself to a *de luxe* apartment on Fifth Avenue, where the young lady's distracted parents were vainly attempting to establish contact with their abducted daughter.

Life did not happen like that, its action was more continuous and deliberate. One day as she was trying, in the darkened picture-theatre, to piece together the interrupted sequence of the film, something which Bertrand had said to her in the nut wood at Cabours came back to her—something about the thread of destiny which Fate was always breaking ruthlessly, too impatient to unpick the knots. Sometimes the merciless scissors snipped capriciously where no tangle was. Would the severed thread, Bertrand had asked her, ever be rejoined, the ravelled ends spliced, so that the whole skein might wind from the beginning?

It was quite impossible for Zellie to follow this particular performance (it was "confusion worse confounded"), so she sat with her arm through Barbara's, happy to feel herself so close to her, allowing the shadow-play to flash before her unheeding eyes. From past experience she knew that the troubles of the luckless couple would end, as most real troubles and all fairy-tale ones do, in their living happily ever after.

She must have dozed a little, because quite soon the mustang-riders gave way to other figures. This girl who was looking at her in a long "close-up" was certainly not Miss Bébé Daniels, featured in the programme this afternoon, but Jean Hamilton, aged seventeen. It was Jean's tragic face as she had looked the day she heard of Achille Gutmann's death. The tears were quivering on the lashes of her lower lids before they welled over to wet her cheeks. And a Biedermeyer figure in voluminous skirt

and enveloping cashmere shawl belonged to no cut-back in this Wild West story, chaotic as it was, but to the apartment in the Ludwigstrasse. It was her mother, Frau Finanzrath, before her husband had received the honourable title of Oberfinanzrath; she could place the date exactly, and recognise each intimate detail of the room, the Meissen porcelain jar in which Papa kept his tobacco, and the rack which held his meerschaum pipes.

Could it be Bertrand and Gabrielle who came next, that boy and girl wandering on a moonlit terrace? The shadow thrown across it was of a high-roofed pigeon-coted château. The formal garden lay below them, and in the long *bassin* the water and the water-lilies had managed somehow to net the three-quarter moon.

She must have closed her eyes for a moment or two, for when she opened them they had gone, and it was Barbara she saw, not this grown-up one sitting beside her, but the Barbara who belonged to Tommy—another pair, brother and sister. They were riding, but not on mustangs and not across the plains of Arizona; their ponies were cantering through the pastures of the West Riding, or was it Wiltshire?

Then came a fade-out, and it was boys only this time. Tommy again, and Charles, and all their friends. Eton boys, Oxford boys, 10th Hussars—boys grown to man's estate wearing British warms, and Kurt and Kuno in their "field-grey" uniforms. She felt a little shy of them, but not of the young children who filled the screen a minute

later. Barbara's children, Laura's, Diana's. With little children she was always at home.

The lights went up; Barbara was holding her hand. "Zellie darling, did you enjoy the movie? It ended all right, didn't it?" Of course it had. They joined the throng which was pressing down the gangway, and moved slowly with it till they reached the entrance. It was reassuring to find the familiar landscape of Marble Arch outside, the cheerful vermilion of motor-buses, the crawling and speeding taxis, the solid blue bulk of a policeman near the island which they swept past. The light of common day obliterated the memory of the shadow-play as surely as sunshine extinguishes the brightness of a fire.

When they were driving home to Hyde Park Mansions, Barbara asked:

"Did you sleep a little during the film? They often make me sleepy; they tire one's eyes."

"Just for a minute perhaps, but I saw a great deal; it was wonderful, too wonderful." She had seen a great deal more than the spectators who had remained awake, a great deal more than Barbara—all that she ever wanted to see, and could never tire of seeing. . . .

Her health was beginning to fail. She bore pain with Spartan fortitude, and pain and weakness had been strangers to her till these two last years. Even now these unwelcome visitors did not daunt her spirit. In conversation she seldom allowed discussion of her ailments, it was too tedious a topic; she wanted to know what

"they" were all doing; no detail was too trivial to relate to her. Her pleasure in books did not desert her, but it was rather difficult to find the right one. Knitting was still a favourite pastime, though it was a pity that all the dear hurrying feet, whose footfalls made her heart beat as she heard them in the narrow lobby, were past the snow-white Shetland-wool stage, feet that now were swift and sure and needed no hand to steady them; but she could do something to guide them still. She could advise and counsel, though not control, for even after knitted bootees have given place to socks and silk stockings, feet can stumble or go astray.

In the evening of life her philosophy remained unchanged. Make friends with sorrow, invite adversity to take a seat by the hearth, share the fire's warmth with disappointment. Resignation makes for endurance. *Fürchterlich*, terrible as things are, the worst like the best is mutable. Interest in the lives of others is what counts; if it be sufficiently keen personal grief and pain are as immaterial as thought itself, as easily controlled. Under the garment of misfortune the wearer may remain unscathed, and that vesture like the rest will grow old, and ultimately be discarded.

She had spent herself recklessly on others and she wished to continue her prodigal outlay. Nothing was held back for herself, but although the treasure-boxes of her children all seemed filled with love from other givers, nevertheless she could squeeze in a penny of her own. There is always room for a pennyworth more of love.

Two new friends had come into her life, Dr. and Mrs. Donald MacKinnon, and they understood and appreciated her as much as she did them. Loneliness was her only dread, the only ill she could not endure, so it was arranged at their invitation that she should occupy a cheerful room in their house. Here was a couple as good, selfless, and devoted as herself; the company they offered smoothed away the only pucker in her serenity.

The pain in her back was bad, but always she made light of it. When she was lying still it disappeared, so for many months she remained in bed, cheerful and hopeful, making plans about the little trousseau which was waiting for her when she was well enough to get up, showing Laura and Barbara the neat new tweed coat-and-skirt hanging in her wardrobe. Visitors came each day, and the good old talk flowed freely as before. It was a wine with which she instantly filled the glasses of her guests, a soft matured vintage. Zellie did not talk much of the Past, the true philosopher lives in the Present.

As nothing could alter her, so none of the disabilities of old age had come; her hearing was perfect, her eyes unchanged, only she tired quickly though she made heroic efforts to disguise this. She was admirably nursed and tended; it was not till the last few weeks when she became feverish at night, that she realised she was ill, not just resting in order to be strong and fresh enough to make a new start. And indeed this was what she was doing. Slowly the truth dawned on her. Then she was

afraid, afraid as children are, of the unknown. *Hasenfuss*, poltroon, that is what her sister had called her before she first left her Stuttgart home. What was this new one she was heading for?

It was arranged for the vicar of St. Mark's to visit her casually. His talk brought her full assurance of the Covenant of Grace. He came again, but her fears had been stilled. She drifted into semi-consciousness, but was able to smile and whisper the names of those she loved. They had been on her lips so long, it was easy to say them, easier and nearer than breathing.

Her eightieth birthday was reached only a few weeks before her death. A young grand-nephew wrote from Germany congratulating her on her age. She did not like it. She felt no older, though she had reached this milestone and though she was dying. Like those whom the Gods love, she was dying young.

Zellie was allowed to feel no suffering: like one of those bright-winged butterflies who live on in a sun-bathed room long after others of their kind have perished in the cold outside, she remained alive but very still.

Once Barbara tried to call her back from that sphere between life and death where the living have no place, and Barbara had never called in vain. She answered. She murmured something which could not be heard clearly; it sounded like "heavy" or "heavenly." Heavy—what was it which weighed upon her? Responsibility for all those loved young lives—no, for that was safely vested in

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others. Heavenly then—what was it that unfolded before her widened vision?

“I am here, darling Zellie, can you see me? It’s Barbara, your five-year-old Barbara.” She did not open her eyes, but she repeated the name. It was the last thing she said.

THE END

